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51 GREAT QUEEN STREET, W.C.

LIGHT & AMUSING LITERATURE.

FOR HOURS OF RELAXATION.

Stories from London Society

A Very Queer Inn by Anonymous - December 1880

Sandy the Tinker by Mrs. J. H. Riddell - Christmas Annual 1880

The American's Tale by Arthur Conan Doyle - Christmas Annual 1880

Seen in the Mirror by Anonymous - Christmas Annual 1880

That Terrible Dentist by Anonymous - Christmas Annual 1880

A Night Among the Nihilists by Arthur Conan Doyle - April 1881

Only Ten Minutes by Anonymous - Christmas Annual 1881

The Gully of Bluemansdyke by Arthur Conan Doyle - Christmas Annual
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That Little Square Box by Arthur Conan Doyle - Christmas Annual 1881

A Queer Fellow-Traveller by W. B. R. - March 1882 [Prize Story reprinted
in Tit-Bits October 21, 1882]

Bones by Arthur Conan Doyle - April 1882

Our Derby Sweepstakes by Arthur Conan Doyle - May 1882

A Blind Man's Notions About Ghosts by W. W. Fenn - November 1882

A Lost Letter by Mrs. J. H. Riddell - Christmas Annual 1882

My Friend the Murderer by Arthur Conan Doyle - Christmas Annual
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Some Remarkable Dreamers by A Remarkable Dreamer - August 1883

A Spectre in a Mess-Room by Anonymous - December 1883

Selecting a Ghost by Arthur Conan Doyle - December 1883

Amusing Ghost Stories by Anonymous - December 1883

The Ghaist o' Ghairlee by Anonymous - Christmas Annual 1883

The Boneless Burglar by H. E. Phillpotts - Christmas Annual 1883

The Silver Hatchet by Arthur Conan Doyle - Christmas Annual 1883

A VERY QUEER INN.

Just as that invariable setting sun which so often ushers a traveller into a story-book was sinking to rest below the horizon, I came in sight of the country inn which was to shelter me for the night.

Inns on a solitary wayside present the same desolate appearance which is noticeable in a stray lamb or a lost child. One ruminates whether they have no expression equivalent to the cry of a child or the bleat of a lamb. These inns are as solitary as Stonehenge. Once the altars of hospitality, they are now mostly visited by the curious.

The inn of Baytown stood near no bay, and only a very untravelled yokel would be likely to call the village close to it a town. The inn was a brown patch on the top of a slope; gray lights from the east fell hard upon it, while the crimson glory of the west slanted off to the distant landscape, and drew every warm tinge away from the village hotel. Immediately I conjured up all those dismal stories whose focus of action centres upon these wayside inns.

However, the dipping sun seemed to be delaying its downfall, so that I might reach my destination under its patronage, just as a spluttering candle will sometimes flare up desperately to accommodate a reader to the last line but one of his book.

I was not insensible to the luminary's attention; I would not make light of it while it made light for me. I quickened my horse's pace and soon drew rein

before Baytown inn. Then the red globe departed in presence, and left only its train of effulgence behind. Evidently earthly monarchs have taken counsel of the celestial one, since they allow their personal splendour to stream off into gorgeous retinue.

But no earthly monarch disports the colours of his court in so wide an arena as the horizon across which the pompous sun swept his train. Serried troops of clouds moved superbly in the haze of his departed majesty, and to its shimmer reached the tallest trees, and their topmost leaves caught the glow of royalty, and shone like bits of burnished gold.

I might have reflected upon the beauty of the scene to an unlimited extent, for I find that the habit of reflection is thus much akin to the habit of smoking—it grows upon one insensibly. And as it is usual to have more than one cigar in a case, so it is usual to possess two or three forms of reverie in the mind. My thoughts were cut short, however, by an ostler, who came out of the inn and laid his hand on my horse's bridle with an air of appropriation. He said,

‘Fine to-day, sir; wet to-morrow.’

‘Well,’ said I, ‘how do you know that?’

‘See those clouds over there, sir! Bless your heart, not that way, but where the sun *doesn't* shine. Pretty closely banked together, you see, sir. Blue as mouldy cheese. Well, if they don't bust to-morrow, I never see

a storm. Come in, sir. "Good stabling for horse and man," as the poet do say.'

'This is a dead-alive place,' I remarked irreverently.

'Not a bit, sir, not a bit. Twice a week the people pours past here on their way to Wookle, which is two miles off. And they pours back again—in the course of nature, which keeps a river wet at its source, as my father used to say. 'Twouldn't be much of a river, I suppose, that filled the sea and got dry at its rise. "Charity begins at home," as my mother used to say.'

'Perhaps you can tell me what your grandmother used to say?' I asked amiably.

The ostler gave me a sly glance.

'She said, sir, according to my memory, that civility were its own reward. But, to my thinking, civility comes all the easier when there's something to wash it down, digestive like.'

'You don't look like a teetotaler,' said I, fumbling in my pocket, while I scrutinised the ostler's red nose. 'Is there anybody human beside yourself here? because, if there is, I should like a room and a meal.'

'Master is down with the pigs,' said the ostler, fingering my remembrance with supple fingers. 'And Simon, I don't know where Simon is, sir. Here, Simon,' he cried, lifting his voice and shouting into vacancy, 'you're wanted.'

The sound died away without an answer to meet it; profound silence ensued for the space of three minutes, at the end of which time the ostler said,

'I don't think he's coming, sir.'

'I don't think he is,' said I.

Imagination must have been rife to dream that any creature was coming in the utter stillness, save a bluebottle fly, which

whisked through the air and settled on my nose.

'Can't you take me in yourself?' said I, as the ostler put up his hands in preparation for another volley.

The man dropped his hands with alacrity.

'Course! Come along, sir, this way. Perhaps you wouldn't mind getting out of the way of that goat. It always butts at strangers, poor thing.'

I willingly consented not to mind, under apprehensive circumstances, though I conjectured whether I or the goat should be an object of pity. After stumbling over a plank, which sent my hat flying into a tub of dirty water, I arrived safely at the inn-door, with the goat in my rear.

'Why, in the name of thunder,' said I inappositely, 'do you keep a goat and a tub before your door?'

'Why, you see, sir,' said the ostler, grinning, 'one's a butt and the other butts. Singler and pluriel, as my schoolmaster used to say.'

'Hang your schoolmaster!' I exclaimed testily.

'Can't, sir,' retorted the ostler; 'he's dead.'

I picked out my drenched hat with a grace that was not suave, and followed the man into a room. There he left me, with the cheering assurance that if the reluctant Simon did not soon come the landlord himself would appear after he had disengaged himself from his pigs. Judging from the silence of Simon's distant presence I prepared to fortify myself with patience, and began to look about me, and to investigate the place as if I were the man in possession.

The large gloomy room in which I sat seemed to have packed into it the ancient refuse furniture of the county. The chair which supported me creaked uneasily, as

though to warn me that it was only warranted to bear the weight of a ghostly ancestor. An old looking-glass above the cracked mantelpiece had tearful tendencies, which induced dull deadened streaks down its would-be glossy surface; and some peacocks' feathers in two antiquated vases waved to and fro like the plumes of a hearse. Some old prints, entitled to the respect of age, but claiming no other respect whatever, backed against the wall, as though they were ready to retire from the scene, a sentiment on their part which did them credit; for they were atrociously executed, and the nearest approach to definite drawing was presented by a head and a tail separated by vacuum. A vivid imagination, ruralised, might discern in these salient features the suggestion of a frolicsome lamb. The sofa was pitted with a disease peculiar to rep and rosewood: a species of furniture smallpox. The ravages of this malady revealed a dirty white substance, which might have been taken from the pictorial lamb after it had tumbled in the gutter.

A chiffonier, crammed with photographs in every stage of consumptive complexion, and weighted by an enormous Bible, completed the chief furniture of the room. After taking stock of a stuffed dog, a footstool, and two more chairs, elegantly frail, the inventory was complete.

I heard a knock at the door; it was very feeble, very uncertain. I shouted out, 'Come in!' for it seemed to me that so unsubstantial a summons must need a vigorous reply in order to reach it.

A waiter opened the door; his back was as weak as the wooden one which supported me. He appeared to have been dispossessed at some time of his spine;

probably in infancy, for he achieved a variety of contortions that could only have been acquired after long practice. He had the inbred ease of a caterpillar, and his hairy hands fostered the crawling illusion.

I saluted this flexible human, as he opened the door and crept round the edge of it to the inside, with a quiet 'Well, sir?'

'Well, sir?' repeated the waiter, staring at me very hard indeed, as if I had him under examination, and he was trying to gauge my profundity.

'Well, sir?' I reiterated, waiting to hear what he would say next.

'Well, sir?' he repeated, as if he were waiting for the same thing too.

'Have you nothing to say for yourself?' demanded I.

'No, sir,' answered the man, with exasperating submission.

'Nothing!' I cried warmly.

'Missis told me to ask you whether you meant to stay here all night.'

'Is that what you call having nothing to say?' asked I.

'Bless you, sir, I haint,' replied the waiter earnestly. 'I never have anything to say, not of my own.'

I looked at the man with sudden compunction, as at one whose speech, like his time, belonged to other people. He noticed the glance, and was going to shrink away, when I called him back.

'You may tell your mistress I mean to stay the night. And—what is the matter?'

For my waiter had begun to cry.

I looked at him in the silence of astonishment. I was uncomfortable. I shut my eyes, to open them again with a sense of reality. There was no need for the test. This waiter of a wayside inn had

already displayed to me two uncommon accomplishments: he undulated and he cried; and he did both with the ease of habit.

I put my hands in my pockets. There is no other attitude which so fully expresses the master of the situation. I felt like a very small First Napoleon.

'Now, my man,' said I, 'what do you mean by this? If you are a knave, I shall find you out; if you are a fool—'

'Bless you, sir,' interrupted the waiter uneasily, 'I baint insane. But the house is chock-full, as I live. All of us sleep here; we never have strangers what stop.'

'And yet your mistress sent to ask me if I meant to stop all night?'

'She didn't, that's it!' cried the waiter, writhing in a frenzy of grief, as if I had stamped upon all his nerves at once. 'She said you could not stop all night; but I forgot, I made a mistake; I—O dear!'

'Don't be a fool,' I said. 'What room in this place do you call your own, because—'

The man petrified me with a stare. Then he said slowly,

'I go anywheres, sir. I haint anything in this world; leastways, not o' mine.'

This was the sublimity of the ridiculous. They are not only next door to each other; they can fall into each other and make ruins. I was impelled to change the purpose which I had before resolved on when I had started in the morning for Baytown inn.

'Never mind about my bedroom,' I said briskly. 'Where is the top loft?'

I looked straight at the snaky figure and the washed-out eyes, receiving in return only a puzzled expression, which revealed nothing, and seemed to have nothing to reveal.

'Come, you know it,' I said persuasively.

But this last effect was lost by the appearance of another figure in the doorway—a figure stout and sleek and well proportioned, whose thick round head was thrust into a soft felt hat, which was trying not to burst its seams asunder under the pressure. It had so far failed as to bulge into several awkward holes.

'Are you the proprietor?' I asked of this third masculine apparition.

'Guess so,' he replied, with a jolly roll on the last word. 'Fat enough for the place, ain't I, sir?'

He did not wait for an answer, but, seeing some symptom of jocosity in his remark, which had totally escaped me, he began to laugh with the vehemence which makes one think of a fit. The waiter had ceased to cry; the landlord was laughing; I could not assume an impassive air.

The last gamut died away at length, and mine host inquired if I wanted anything.

'I want a bedroom,' said I, with some hesitation. Perhaps the landlord could cry as well as his man.

'Bedroom ready,' promptly replied the landlord. 'Here, you Wiggler, go and tell your missis to be quick.'

The Wiggler departed, and I began with,

'Your man—'

'A little soft—ha, ha!' said the landlord, rubbing his hands in a cheerful way. 'We are all soft somewhere, eh, sir? Some in the head; some in the heart. Now, my place is in the heart.'

I congratulated the landlord on the happy locality of his tender spot, and asked him if there was only one bedroom for travellers in the house.

'Only one, sir. Our trade de-

pend on the market-people. We are not often favoured with a gentleman of your evident ability, sir. Ha, ha! There's a garret, sir, where they say you can have a fine view of the moon. Ha, ha, ha! We call it the top loft, sir.'

I asked myself how a man could laugh so much at nothing, and for answer found myself laughing too. We joined our peals together, and made a chime which might have convinced a misanthrope that we were convulsed with overpowering wit.

'Well, that's a good joke,' said my landlord, rubbing his hands with the satisfied air of a man who had just made a bargain.

'Capital!' echoed I.

'One doesn't get that sort of thing every day.' My landlord spoke like a connoisseur.

'No, nor every other day,' said I cordially.

'You're a good judge, sir, if you know as much about wine—'

I accepted the delicate hint, and before long mine host and I sat opposite to each other in a small parlour, with a bottle of claret between us, which no more separated us than a galvanic battery divides the people who are holding on to its wires.

I had a purpose in my conversation with the landlord; there were times when I doubted whether he had not a purpose with me. Through the bursts of his exuberant mirth I caught now and then a stray glance, which was distrustful, sharp, anxious. But one cannot draw a flash of lightning as it passes, and I could not transcribe definitely on my mind the glances which aroused me.

We sat and talked long. I persisted in chatting until my dinner was ready. The landlord was not so willing to stay as I was to keep him. He took an immense interest in my dinner, and left the room

several times to overlook it. I waited for him to come back, and on the principle of attraction, by which a strong will galvanises a weak one, he came back, always with a joke upon his lips. I laughed so much to accommodate him, that I began to long for the serenity of a meal. But my mirth and my conversational powers had as yet been wasted, and I had not arrived at the consciousness of a well-earned repast.

Yet I had made minute inquiries. With the enthusiasm of an antiquary, I had asked for a history of the old inn about me. The landlord gave it freely. I inquired if he would allow me to look through it. With affability he promised me an inquisitorial visit after dinner. But before dinner—For once my baffled faculties hoped that a meal would prove suggestive instead of soporific.

As it progressed in the large ghostly room, which I had first entered, I meditated on several plans of circumventing the landlord. It is always difficult to fathom jollity; one has much more chance of unmasking a serious shrewd man than of showing up an individual bulwarked with the *bonhomie* of my jolly landlord. There was no air of mystery about him. It is proverbially possible to find skeletons in cupboards, where a fit darkness reigns. But to fish one up out of a steaming punch-bowl, the very reservoir of joviality, is scarcely to be expected of any man.

However, my task had been set me, and I had promised to execute it, with the suggestion that a sterner execution might be the result of it. I had, happily, no tremors, only an incertitude as to the best way of proceeding. Under this perplexity, for the first time in my life, I ceased to envy one living statesman.

My dinner was a good one, and I could not help appreciating the zeal of the landlord, as my palate warmed with fine flavours. For an out-of-the-way place the cooking was extraordinary, and was explained by the assertion of my landlord that he had been the pupil of a renowned *chef*. It is not easy to cherish suspicions against a man who gives you a good dinner; and after the Wriggler had corkscrewed away my last dish, I lit a cigar and slowly paced the room.

'The confounded dreamer!' said I, fondly apostrophising an absent friend. 'He will find a ghost in his sugar-basin some day. Suspicious, indeed! Think of that mushroom omelette, and don't talk to me of suspicions. Pooh! a man with a firm mind can see at a glance that the idea was only the wildest conjecture.'

At this resolute climax the door creaked ominously. My firm mind started on its well-balanced hinges. The door was not well balanced at all; but it swung on its hinges, nevertheless, and revealed the Wriggler.

As an *habitué* of the place and its customs since five o'clock, I was not surprised that he did not speak. It was not even astonishing to find him staring at me meditatively for a second or two. I maintained that serene composure which any adept in the art of being photographed soon learns. With similar composure he scanned my features. But that he writhed continually, one might have taken him for a petrified artist, absorbed in the sublime reverie of creating me on canvas.

I waited patiently for speech from the oracle. When it came, I was persuaded it would be worth hearing. Expectations are delusive; the Wriggler suddenly withdrew his face, and was about to

latch the door outside. I interposed. He was quietly wriggling with the grace of a boa-constrictor in the middle of my room; my hand was tenacious of his coat-collar.

'Now,' said I, with as much suavity as I could command, 'you must explain to me your kind scrutiny of my features. You don't understand? Well, what is there in my face to stare at?'

'Missis wanted me to look at you,' said the Wriggler.

It was quite evident that the man had no mind to pursue his mistress's behest, for he slid to the door with the subtle ease that oil trickles down a warm tin.

'Please,' faltered the Wriggler, 'missis didn't tell me to tell you I was to look at you.'

'What of that?' I demanded.

'Don't tell her,' replied the man. 'If she knew I told you, she would be angry if you told her.'

I consented to have nothing to do with these perplexing pronouns, and told the man to go away and mind his own business.

'Lor', sir,' said he, in departing, 'I haint got no business, not o' mine.'

This unexpected visit had upset all my comfortable theories of resolving my friend's arguments into dreams. Why should the Wriggler be sent to look at me? I was not a young man of Apollo-like appearance, nor at all calculated to impress the imagination even of a landlady. When acquaintances wish to pay me a compliment, they find it easiest to congratulate me on the improvement in my general appearance if I mount a pair of eye-glasses. I appreciate their delicacy, while I gauge it. Without a looking-glass it is possible for me to know that to produce effect I must purchase it. No, the landlady's interest in

my features could not be due to an admiration of them during any surreptitious glance which she might have obtained.

There was a mystery, without doubt—the waiter had convinced me on that score—and I set myself to brood over it in a methodical manner. But the landlord's jolly face interposed continually between me and my morbid fancies. How could such an appearance hold any horror in disguise? Impossible. And yet—ah, yet—I dropped into the depths of a reverie.

A reverie is the plantation where phantoms are raised. They spring up like the proverbial mushrooms, and they are the same sort of creation—dark, misshapen, flexible. It was too warm for a fire, or else a few burning coals heat the chill atmosphere of sickly fancies, and induce a current of fresh air through the mind. I stared at the fireless grate; I watched the flickering candles; I measured my shadow on the wall; I paced the room; I sat down on every chair; I even turned up the Bible, read attentively through Noah's family-tree, and having satisfied myself as to his extreme respectability, I drank to his memory.

Now, whether the wine fermented an idea, or whether the Bible supplied it, I never can determine. Certain it is that I returned to the latter, and turned over its leaves between the division that separates the Old Testament from the New. There another genealogy confronted me: of less ancient stock than Noah's, but of more interest to me on that account.

There were three pages inserted between the Old and New Testament, closely lined, and headed respectively with Births, Marriages, Deaths. This was a

family Bible; and the compiler of it had provided lines enough to certify the names of as many children as Methuselah might have had during his thousand years of existence. There was provision made for forty births, forty marriages, and forty deaths. The supply, in all respects, was generous.

But generosity is one of those commodities which, like charity, is often ill-bestowed. In this desert of a register there existed only one oasis of an entry in black ink—one on each page. They were written in a large anxious hand, which I easily traced to my landlord. One generally observes that these jovial uneducated men only exhibit anxiety when they sit down to write. I traced the register backwards. Of death there was one notice:

'Died on the 20th January 18— my mother, Elizabeth Ann Fern, aged seventy-six. Her end was peace.'

Under the head of marriages this singular statement occurred:

'On the 10th September 18— I, Thomas Fern, bachelor, married Mary Sexton, spinster, at the parish church, Baytown. May we never live to regret it!'

I turned to the births. There was one recorded:

'This day, the 9th August 18—, I, Thomas Fern, joyfully record the birth of a daughter. Her name is to be Lucy.'

This announcement was dated eleven years past. I shut the Bible. These records were quite in the vein of my jolly landlord. They were simple and practical. I felt relieved again, and determined to see if the child was still extant, with the intent of having her in to amuse, after the fashion of an elderly man who likes children.

I walked out of my sitting-

room, and, in the low passage outside, came into concussion with my first friend—the ostler. He was running through the house from back to front, and dashed against me, as if he thought I was an apparition, and expected to find me only a vaporous obstacle.

‘Sharp work, sir,’ said he, rubbing his forehead where it had met mine.

‘Particularly so,’ said I, trying to imitate his tone of cordial fraternity.

‘That dratted goat has flied away, you see, sir, and I was—’

‘Flying after it,’ said I comprehensively. ‘Very good! I should not expect anything in this place to follow the ordinary suggestions of Nature. Can I assist you?’

‘Well, it’s storming,’ said the ostler, in the reflective manner which I had observed before. ‘That ’ere goat’s a regular Wandering Jew. You never seed the brain it has for travelling. It’s my belief it’s haunted.’

The ostler dropped his voice to an impressive whisper.

‘You don’t mean it!’ I said, looking mysterious.

‘Fact, sir! Ever since— But bless my heart, if I go out with a ghost to carry my thoughts for me, I shall never get down to Ditchley Pond.’

‘If the goat has such a remarkable bump of locality as you suggest,’ said I, ‘could it not find its way back again?’

‘Bless your hinnercent mind, sir, the missis wouldn’t rest a moment while that ’ere goat was flying about. Ever since—’

There was a pause again. I nodded encouragingly. ‘Yes; ever since—’

‘No; that I won’t!’ cried the ostler, buttoning up his coat-collar with sudden determination. ‘Tain’t the sort of reflection for a

dark night. Would you like to come, sir? I daresay it won’t rain all the way to Ditchley Pond. That dratted goat always flies to the water like a poisoned rat.’

‘How far is it?’ asked I hesitatingly.

‘Something short of two mile, sir. I reckon a little more back, because the creature has to be pulled against its will. When a thing sticks its four legs into the ground square, you has an instinct that it have got two too many.’

‘Does your mistress expect you to go out in this storm after the goat?’ said I.

‘Hush-sh, sir! We never tell her it’s lost till it’s found. She’d be in that wandering way that runs between hysterics and a faint. I’ll run him up in no time; and if you are afraid of spoiling the shine of your hat, sir, I wouldn’t advise you to go with me, for those blue clouds are bursting their very skins.’

I submitted to this kind consideration, and, out of respect to my hat, declined the wild goat-chase. The ostler nodded me a cheery good-night and opened the front door. There was a rush of rain outside, and the wind, with wet skirts, trailed through the passage, and sighed and moaned.

I would have begged the man to delay his search until calmer weather; but he had shut the door and was gone. I opened it to call after him; there was no response, save from the heavy wind. I heard the ostler’s feet racing through the dark night. Would he have told me the sequel of that ‘ever since—’ if I had gone with him? Not he, after that resolution of voice and action. Besides, I had rheumatism, and avoided the rain from sheer instinct.

I determined to hunt out the mistress of the establishment. If

she were as peculiar as the rest of its supporters, I thought the quartet of singularity would be complete. Besides, there was the child, and one seeks for a child by its mother's side, as one looks for seaweed on the shore of the ocean. I pursued my way through the irregular passage that ran from back to front, with a keen look-out ahead, lest the Wiggler should be also bent upon some express message, which might lead to some more sharp work, as the ostler expressively termed it.

The passage was dimly lighted, as for accustomed feet, and I stumbled twice over steps that occurred in the darkest recesses of the corridor. There were voices sounding, however, in the fore, and there was also a ray of light, which slanted through an open doorway; a light that flickered and waned and reddened, and came evidently from a fire. The voices drifted over the light; they were duo—the treble of a woman, the rougher utterance of a man.

I went cautiously along, but not stealthily; for when one is not very sure of one's reception, there is nothing like footfalls to presage an introduction. Evidently my boots served this purpose; the voices suddenly stopped. I went on, pushed farther open the already opened door, and stood before my landlord's wife and the Wiggler. The Wiggler had been under cross-examination; there was the evidence of restraint and anxious memory upon his face. He welcomed my advent with relief, and looked at the door as a felon looks at the 'Way out' for the public thoroughfare. The woman before me rose as I made my unceremonious entrance. I had purposely avoided knocking; but the purpose was not sufficient to extinguish my annoyance at having committed a breach of

common courtesy, most especially as I looked at the landlady. I had expected to see a buxom dame of 'marmish' manners and florid countenance. Instead, I saw a woman who could have compelled respect in any society. Her composure, the decision and repose of her massive olive-skinned face, the unconscious steadiness and dignity of her attitude, were impressive. My intentional discourtesy ceased to be atoned for by circumstances; her presence made the intrusion an unwarrantable liberty.

'I must really apologise,' said I, with real earnestness. 'My abrupt entrance cannot be excused by the only excuse I have to make—that I heard voices within, and wanted to speak to some one.'

'It is no matter, sir,' said Mrs. Fern, looking a little surprised. 'I am quite ready to speak to you, sir, if there is anything I can do for you. Simon, you may go.'

The accent of this speech was Scotch; that nativity explained some portion of the landlady's manner. Simon, the Wiggler, went with alacrity, and was so jubilant over his escape, that he ventured the suggestion of a wink at me.

'Are you lonely, sir?' asked Mrs. Fern, with a smile, which showed to advantage on her thin crisp lips.

'Rather eerie, I think,' said I. 'You will understand a native word.'

'You catch a Scotch twang in my speech,' she said; 'but I am not Scotch, though my father was. He was a superstitious man, and used to make *me* eerie with his tales of fays and goblins upon the winter mountains.'

'That sort of education should develop here,' said I. 'One could swear to a legion of spirits round this house. Are you nervous?'

'Not a bit,' said she, with a cheery laugh. 'Nor are you, sir; only uncommonly impressionable for a man.'

'You have a taste for photography,' said I, smiling. 'It asserts itself here as well as in your drawing-room.'

'Ah, sir, that is my husband. I hate litter, and like every bit of mahogany to show off its polish, as long as there is any. But my husband has an odd fancy to keep brittle stuff everywhere, and he wouldn't part with those photographs for all the fine pictures that were ever painted.'

'That is a hobby,' said I.

'No, begging your pardon, sir,' Mrs. Fern answered, 'it is a soft heart. Didn't he tell you he had a soft heart? Well, it's true, though people are not often correct about their characteristics, to my thinking. 'Things soon get valuable to him by association; and he keeps more than one silly trifle because he has kept it before, for some forgotten reason. I hate litters; but he humours me, and I must humour him.'

'I don't know whether I ought to condemn your sex, even to make you an exception, Mrs. Fern,' said I. 'But women are not generally as fair as you in giving and receiving.'

'Are you married, sir?' asked the landlady; and her shrewd placid face, as it surveyed me, made the question perfectly becoming.

'Not I,' said I, laughing. 'Never had a fancy yet, except for cigars. Do you believe it?'

'No,' she said quietly. 'I don't.' The voice was resolute, but there was not a sign of curiosity upon her face. She turned the subject, not abruptly, but by a leading route.

'I was going to say, sir, that only a married man has a chance

of knowing how much a woman can give and give in without seeming to do either. You must not reckon yourself a judge, sir, if you will pardon my saying so.'

'Thank you for setting me straight,' I answered. 'I recognise you as an authority. But am I detaining you as much as I am keeping you standing? Your husband promised to let me see some rooms in the house after dinner.'

'He will be here in a minute,' Mrs. Fern replied. 'Won't you sit down, sir? Simon, where is George?'

This latter was addressed to the Wiggler, who had crept into the room with some coals. While I wondered that so dignified a woman should ask a servant about her husband by his Christian name, she turned to me with an interpreting glance and an amused laugh.

'Not my husband, sir, but the ostler!'

I bowed instinctively, and began to be afraid lest my purpose should be discernible to this quick-eyed woman. In my conversation with her I had forgotten it, and this reminder made me feel ill at ease.

The Wiggler stood blankly still, coals in hands and mouth agape. His mistress betrayed no impatience, but said decisively,

'Are you silly, Simon?'

The nursery tale which used to beguile my childhood with pictures and verses, anent an acute pieman who refused Simon a pie without a penny, here came vividly to my mind. I laughed, and the landlady heard me.

'Pray excuse me,' said I apologetically. 'It is only another instance of photography which I will explain to you in a moment.'

'You have not forgotten the nursery, sir,' said she, smiling. 'Simon, where is George?'

The poor Wiggler trembled, and I could divine the cause of his agitation after the ostler's remarks.

'Well, Simon?' said his mistress, with asperity.

'He's out,' burst forth the unhappy waiter, wringing his hands and shooting the coals forth right and left.

'Good luck, man!' exclaimed Mrs. Fern, seizing the shovel-handle and stopping the downfall. 'Are you quite daft?' She threw the coals on the fire, and then petrified the Wiggler with another question: 'Why has George gone out? He will get drowned in this deluge.'

The Wiggler faltered miserably. He stuttered and broke into a palpable falsehood:

'Please, 'm, I don't know.'

His mistress dismissed him, with an uneasy expression upon her face.

'One can never judge of that poor fellow,' she said to me. 'He generally seems to tell a lie when he speaks the truth; and when he does venture on a falsehood he manages to assume a plausible air.'

I asked myself if she were trying to deceive herself or me. Her calm straightforward face rebuked my suspicions.

At this moment my landlord entered. He nodded at me, and rolled out a jolly—

'Evening, sir. How did you like your dinner?'

'Never ate a better one,' I answered. 'You are a master of combinations.'

'I served under a good master, you see, sir. What is the matter, missus? You don't look spry to-night.'

'George has gone out,' said the landlady, in a distrustful tone.

'Has he?' said Mr. Fern, stooping down low to tie up a bootlace. 'Well, it's a mercy he's weather-

proofed, ain't it? There's enough water to-night to drown any one with warmer blood than a fish.'

'Why has he gone out?' asked his wife.

'Couldn't swear,' replied the landlord, still busied with his bootlace. 'He's one of the sort that has whims. Best to leave whims to break out free, like small-pox or scarlet-fever, I say.'

This liberal view of the subject did not seem to satisfy Mrs. Fern. I saw that a question trembled on her lip, which she once or twice resolutely repressed. I should have retired in order to afford her the liberty of making it, but that her husband was evidently afraid of meeting the demand. He seemed anxious to keep me there, and told his wife to get out some of her own particular cordial, which he warranted would warm a corpse back to life. I suggested that it was a wonder his house was not besieged for so marvellous an elixir, and he laughed, and asked me, as a future corpse, to give my opinion of the liqueur.

It was excellent—sweet as Noyeau, almost as fine-flavoured as Chartreuse; and as I mentioned Chartreuse I was forthwith led into telling a legend of an old monk, who had divulged the secret of a famous liqueur, and whose retribution was devised by his fellows. He was allowed to take nothing but the liqueur until he died. 'Best way of being starved I ever heard of,' ejaculated the landlord, and he went to put a wedge of wood into a shaking window.

And during this time the storm grew in passion and intensity. There was a wild animus in its strength; there was almost personal spite in its clamours at the doors and windows. The landlady's face got whiter, and her thin lips almost disappear-

ed in the pressure with which they met. Her husband drank the cordial, held it up to the light and admired its colour; but he laughed uneasily.

I was anxious to introduce the topic of the child, and yet knew not how. Mrs. Fern wore a black dress, but there was no crape upon it; and above its blackness, no sign of mourning about it. Neither were there any signs of childhood in this living-room. I looked vainly for a doll, or a toy, or a ribbon, or a shoe. Where, then, was little Lucy Fern? On a visit? in her bed? Surely not. That man and woman had no air about them which bespoke the caresses of a child. And on such a fearful night as this, no child could be left alone; no mother, with the evident tenderness of Mrs. Fern's disposition, would fail to be by the cot of the house, and to make a warm presence there through the desolate and resounding darkness.

I drank two glasses of cordial, and my landlady was pressing another on me, when there came a tap at the back door; and thither went the landlord. George followed his master into the kitchen, and in the rear came the Wiggler, supported by his fellow-servant's presence. Mrs. Fern was holding the bottle over my little glass when they entered; she put it down again.

The landlord took off his hat and put it on again: this served to pass the first awkward moment. Mrs. Fern scanned George thoroughly. He was wet from head to foot, and rain-drops trickled from his heavy eyebrows down his broad flat face, and some of them entered his gaping mouth.

'Well, George,' said Mrs. Fern rather shortly, 'I should have thought you had had enough of water without swallowing it!

Come near the fire, man, and let us look at ye.'

George advanced, an unwilling spectacle. I could not help smiling. The wiry ostler was deluged, his short coat was patched with masses of wet, his cuff-sleeves were twinkling with rain-drops; and he himself looked as if he had lost his identity—had become an amphibious creature, and was bewildered at his new condition.

'Why, man, ye're as daft as Simon!' said Mrs. Fern impatiently. 'Is the water glueing your feet to the floor? What possessed you to go out this night?'

There was silence. The landlord returned to his bootlace; the Wiggler began to slide to the door; George kept his ground, but bent his head and looked at the floor. I was an interested spectator of this sudden tableau. Mrs. Fern's brow clouded; into her clear gray eyes there stole a hot mist, and she half turned away and opened a cupboard-door.

'Of course,' she said, in a low troubled voice. 'I knew it must be that. George, have you brought it back?'

The question was spoken in a different tone from the soliloquy. There was a breath of defiance in it; and the woman faced the ostler inquiringly.

'Yes, mum,' said George. 'I didn't want you to know about it until I brought it back; but that Wiggler is always a burstin' of himself with a secret, if it is no bigger than a sparrow's egg.'

Mrs. Fern took up the bottle of cordial again. Her hand was not as steady as before, but she managed to pour me out my glass. Then she produced a tumbler, half filled it, and gave it to the ostler.

'Take that, George, and go to bed, and Simon shall dry your

clothes : you're a good lad. And the goat's all right ?

'Heain't too ill to be obstinate,' said George, smiling assuringly. 'Not a soul can manage that rampageous animal since—'

'Hush !' said the landlord. 'Enough of that. Don't stand shivering, my lad ; you can put off having rheumatism till you're as old as me.'

George departed with a general good-night, followed by the Wriggler. A strange gloom had fallen on mine host, and mine hostess looked stern and sad. I could make no inquiries that night, and asked, instead, for my candle. Mrs. Fern gave it to me, and offered to show me to my bedroom. It was still early, but I had no mind to face the sepulchral parlour again. Mine host bade me good-night and hoped I should sleep well, and I returned the compliment. Mrs. Fern preceded me up-stairs, opened a door, and hoped that I should be comfortable. I replied suitably, and was left alone with my candle, my bedroom, and my reflections.

This new chamber was situated exactly over the parlour, and was of the same dimensions and the same dreariness. The furniture was still more worn than that below-stairs, and the huge bedstead stood like a stranded ark in the middle of the apartment. I walked across the worm-eaten floor to the place where my small knapsack stood, and began to undo the straps ; they creaked, but something else creaked, and I sprang to the door and opened it wide, to find nothing. There was an old key in the lock, too rusty to turn ; there was no bolt to the door ; and the only protection I could devise consisted in placing a chair against the door and on the chair two tin candlesticks, so that any one

wishing to enter must perforce enter with a noise.

The storm was getting madder every moment. I pulled up my blind and peered into the deluged country through the window. The rain dashed against it in heavy splashes ; but in the intervals I could see a sombre landscape, in which the draggled trees stood like giants, melancholy and forlorn. A few lights were dotted about the village, and the wind made them shiver as it passed over them to grapple with the trees in furious gusts of spasmodic strength. The view without was suicidal in its influences. I turned again to the one within. Except that the room was dry and sheltered, it was scarcely more cheering than the miserable landscape. I held up my candle and glanced round me. There was but one picture on the wall. It was a photograph enlarged and coloured : the photograph of a very pretty child, with light-blue eyes and curling flaxen hair. And the face boded the firmness of Mrs. Fern, together with the good-humour and frankness of her husband. This must be the child whose birth was registered in the family Bible. She looked about seven years old, but the intelligence of her large eyes and wide brow spoke of a mental growth beyond the proportion of the physical. I was not surprised at the unusual brightness of this child ; her mother was a remarkable woman, repressed by ordinary circumstances. Even a sculptor would show no recognised talent if he had only cast iron to mould. And the circumstances of Mrs. Fern's life were not such as to give her scope for the expression of a resolute and original character. In some volcanic era she might have stood as the burning-bush, illuminated with all its fiery

passions, even the focus of them, while she remained erect and unconsumed.

Yet these forces of character are seldom wholly lost, though they be concealed. The young child at whose portrait I was gazing had the prophetic air of one whose way in the world would be signalled by phosphorescent footprints, and whose speech, when it fell, would be clearer than the mumble of the crowd. Where was she, this child? Did not her mother love her with that affection which a mature mind conceives for one cast in the same mould, still undeveloped, but giving hints of power lying within the measure of its growth, as a young science prophesies material of wonderment for coming ages?

I could not go to bed while the storm still raged. There was a sofa in one corner, and I wheeled it close away from the wall, and lay myself down and listened to the demoniacal breathing of the storm. With a hundred eerie voices it shrieked past my window and sent a passing blast down the chimney. With a thump and a twirl and a skurry like a Highland reel gone mad, the dervish wind played its blustering pranks, till it moaned like a spent thing, and sobbed with the reaction of its furious anguish.

Under such influence I fell asleep, and the last face I had seen came to me—a little face, the crowning of a slender delicate form; a little face with pleading eyes, and earnest visage, and determined lips and brows; a straight slim creature, that held out its hands to me, and the rain-drops fell from them drearily. I tried to touch it, but I could not; it shrank from my approach, and still entreated me when I left it; and when I gave up all hope of

holding it in my grasp, it came and whispered close to my ear with wet cold lips that it was wandering, ever wandering. Unhouselled and tormented, restless and tired to death, it sought for peace, and yet could not find a clod of mother earth that would cover it and keep it warm.

The wan eyes pleaded for sleep, the young worn face wanted a yielding pillow, the little body strained with sickening pilgrimage was all a-quiver for a couch whereon to lay its limbs.

I could not touch it nor speak to it—it went. And darkness followed it and overspread me, and dreamless slumber came upon me, wherein lies the monotony of unconsciousness.

Something awoke me, I could not tell what. I sprang to my feet with that bewildering sense which comes from startled awakening, that I must act in a crisis without knowing what the crisis might be. Gradually my nerves regained vitality. What had awoke me? There was not a sound in the house. And yet, was there not? In acute states of sensitiveness one seems to feel sound rather than to hear it. I knew that there were footsteps moving not many paces off. I looked at my watch: it was one o'clock in the morning. I had slept for three hours. And again I listened. There were steps approaching close to my door. Double footsteps; two people, and one was the onerous tread of man, the other of light-footed woman. I looked at the door, expecting to see it burst open, with a shock of tin candlesticks, and Heaven only knows what other shocks besides. But my door remained unmoved, and I advanced to it swiftly and laid my head against the keyhole. A woman's dress rustled. Mrs. Fern's voice whispered sadly,

'Dear Thomas, not to-night! O, not to-night!'

'Ay, to-night,' answered the landlord, in a dogged sullen tone that I could scarcely recognise as his. 'Go you to bed, my lass, and I will fetch a light.'

'How can I go to bed? Thomas, you are mad. Not to-night, dear Thomas. You have not the nerve.'

'Go you to bed, lass. Go back, lass. Leave me alone; I'm going to get a light.'

I heard the heavy footsteps descend and the lighter footsteps ascend. There was a dead silence, in which twenty fancies rose like night shades in my mind. One minute contained the materials for a hundred lives. A hundred lives are lived through sixty years each, with less emotion, less incidents, than were crammed into that minute of absolute inaction.

The candle had burnt to the socket; at the same time I was conscious that the storm no longer raged. I drew up the blind, and from the broken sky, worn as it were to pieces, the moon beamed calmly. That most imperturbable light has no heart of fire in it; it makes use of a quintessence of devouring flame only to radiate its surface—like many a stoical nature, that basks in the fame of a great name, and has no sympathy for the genius that creates it.

Nevertheless, that reflected light was next best to having a new candle, which I had not. Mine was flickering out fast. Since I could not carry the moon about with me, I would have foregone the universal radiance for the sake of having an ordinary dip. Still, I thought one might be worse off without a moon. I waited for some time, and heard no sound. Perhaps my landlord had found the queen of the night effulgent enough to make a candle unnecessary. I opened the door,

and stood in the dark passage. Presently footsteps came along the corridor down-stairs, and no light came with them. The footsteps came nearer, and up the stairs. Before they reached the landing on which my door opened I had retreated behind it, and had shut it.

A pause of the heavy feet, and then they went on upwards, and my mind carried my body after them; for, with a sudden resolution, I turned into the black stairway, and followed my landlord in my stockinged feet. He stayed a moment at the next landing in the darkness, and his wife came to her bedroom-door and entreated him to rest. He answered her doggedly, bade her back to her bed, shut her door after her, and went on. I went on. A slight twist in the landing showed a steep ladder, whitened by the moon, that streamed through a small window. My landlord sped up this as agilely as if he were not stout. I watched him to the top of it. He unclosed his hand, and put a key in the door that fronted the ladder. The lock turned noiselessly, and he went in, leaving the door ajar. Up that ladder I crept carefully. I was not so corpulent as the landlord, but my feet blundered and were not certain.

I reached the top without making a sound. Then I pushed open the door, and stood within a room that I knew was the top loft.

In one moment I saw its peculiarities; in another I saw its mystery. The moonlight was radiantly cold within its compass; there was nothing unrevealed. It showed an attic with a lean-to roof, and the rafters above were rough and splintered. It lit up, with the height of contrast, black hangings that were nailed against

the walls. It shone into the empty, blackened, ill-shaped room, and lay upon the pile of a red rug that covered the centre of the floor; and upon a box with silver handles raised high in the midst; and upon an old man grovelling before it in a posture that was too undone for kneeling and too utterly debased for devotion.

And I, with senses alert, and with cold veins, moved a heavy step further into the room. My landlord sprang to his feet, and stood before me, and looked at me, and spoke no word. I spoke.

'You are found out at last, Mr. Fern,' I said.

He looked at me, and waited for the words to form sense within his brain. Then, with a sigh and with unmoved acquiescence,

'Yes, at last.'

I scarcely knew what to say next: the man did not defy me; he only looked nonplussed.

'The law has reached you through me, Mr. Fern; you must submit to it.'

'Yes, yes,' he said quietly. 'But I have duped it this three year come October.'

'Great Heaven!' I cried; 'can you talk coolly of your crime? Are you hardened to the most awful form of murder—'

'Eh, what?' said the man, dazed at the first word, and indignant and furious at the second. 'I a murderer? Curse you! God judge you, sir, as you have foully judged me.'

He laid his great hand upon my arm, and shook it. The tears were running down his face, while the deep curses of a broken heart thronged to his lips, and stayed there for powerlessness of utterance. I looked at him and at the silvered coffin and at the desolate room, and wrenched my arm from his grasp.

'Then, in the name of your

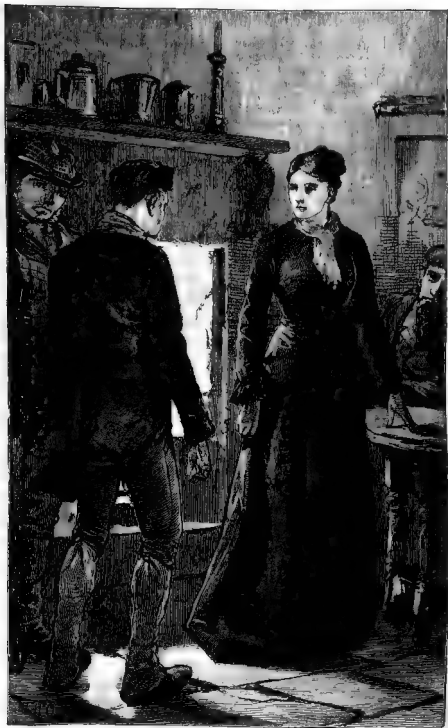
Judge and mine, what is that?' I said, pointing to the sepulchral box.

His anger died; his passion was quenched; he covered his face with his hands, and groped his way to the little coffin, and laid his head upon it, and cried with words unintelligible some names of endearment that were framed in sobs. I felt a movement behind me, and turned to see Mrs. Fern. Her face was as white as the light that illumined it, but the strength of her bearing was unshaken by the funereal room or the stricken husband. She had put on a long gown, and beneath it her breath came and went quickly; otherwise the form of her mien was calm.

She looked at me and passed me, and went to her husband and put her arms round his neck. He moved to her touch, and laid his great tousled head upon her shoulder. The passion of grief which shook him showed the balance of that jovial temperament. She smoothed his face with her hand as if it had been a baby's; she bent over his head her indomitable one, tearless, tender, powerful. And, after a time, with a slight movement she brought his eyes and hers to the small window, and pointed to him the heavens, from which all clouds were drifting, where the serene rested deep blue between the glittering stars, and stretched backwards from the bright white moon.

He lifted his small eyes to her face with a curious expression, like the appeal of the dumb brute that begs for a translation of the feeling that it cannot give tongue to. There was no shade of sentimentality in Mrs. Fern's spoken answer to this mute speech.

'Why will you not look there instead of here?'



A MYSTERIOUS LANDLADY.

See 'A Very Queer Inn.'

He turned back to the coffin, and hid his face from the suggestions of the far-away heavens. His words were thick, and his hoarse voice quivered.

'Because this is her. The bit of flesh I held is here; the lips I kissed are here; the cheek I loved is here. It is only the thing, you say, not the spirit. The spirit may be yonder, as cold and uncanny as those blessed stars. But 'twas the dear body that I nursed and loved. The bright eyes, her blue eyes—I nailed them safe in here.'

He nodded his head at me, and went on with a proud mournfulness I should not have expected of him:

'You called me a hard word, sir,—a word that might tempt a man to be the vile brute you named. Your scent is mighty keen, sir, but it sniffed astray at the last. The demon that killed my child was Croup, and I kissed down her dead eyelids. You may go in the churchyard and see her name written on a gravestone, and you might have seen, three years ago, a funeral there. They put a coffin in the ground, didn't they, wife? but it don't hold my darling.'

He stood up straight now, and faced me with tremor, with eagerness. Grief and passion gave him eloquence, and his defence was warm.

'Do you think I would give my pretty one to the filthy worms, to eat out her eyes, and crawl into her ears, and feed on her lips? Do you think I would put her into the cold, the storm, and the sodden earth? Couldn't the old roof that had sheltered her lively living body cover her when she was so mighty still and gave no trouble? I read an old book that tells how to wrap up the dead, that they will keep at least

for years. I made two coffins, one within the other, and put her on a soft feather bed inside them. And I shut her up and brought her here, and kept her here. And they buried an empty box yonder; and I and wife held another service here, without e'er a clergyman, but with our groans and tears.

'And the child was always frightened in a storm; I always come to watch when there is rain and wind. But to-night my lass persuaded me not to come because you were in the house. I waited, but my spirit wouldn't hold. I had to come, and I came at last, just to see her quiet, after the hullabaloo. And you came, sir; you've outwitted me. My lass is a keen lass, and she read somewhat in your face. You never married; you never lost a child. And you think it's easy to bury dead limbs out of your sight? But it ain't; Lord, it ain't. It's the heart-breakingest thing; it's—O Lord!'

His head bent over the coffin-lid again. I stepped to Mrs. Fern and whispered to her,

'Forgive me, I will leave you now. I will go to my room until morning. Will you see me then?'

She nodded, and I went.

A year later, I stood in the churchyard of Baytown, and with me stood George the ostler. The mortal remains of little Lucy Fern lay then beneath the gravestone. I had gone to the clergyman of the parish after that stormy night. He had heard my tale with some professional horror and with much human sympathy, and he had lent his aid in conveying to its last resting-place the coffin of the top loft.

And a year after, George and I stood there together. The ostler rambled in his meditative style, while I listened:

'Bless you, sir, you did a sight of good to the master and missis. Queer whispers was always on the go. They never could be happy with a dead corpse a-corrupting of itself over their heads. As my mother used to say, the worms must live, and we ain't no right to stand against the natural food of a thing. Curious thing, Miss Lucy died in a storm; couldn't tell which howled the louder—it or master. Not missis, bless you, sir. She's one of that sort that chews her tears, reg'lar.

'That dratted goat was the plaything of Miss Lucy. It were always civil to her, and as sweet as an ass eating hay. But the night she died, it made off in the storm. The missis sent me after it; and when I had tugged it back, the little soul was dead. But the goat always goes astray now when there's storm. The missis won't have it chained up, because of Miss Lucy; but she doesn't like it to go away, for she's got a fancy, her father taught her, that the child has a hold on the goat somehow—sort of invisible reins,

sir; and it might go off and drown itself in that sloppy pond, and then the sperit of Miss Lucy would naturally go down; and, bless you, sir, I hain't up to these spiritual things. My grandfather used to say, he liked the sperits that you can keep bottled up; *they* don't give you the shivers when they gets into you. Pretty grave, sir! I planted them violets. The earth do know how to put a good face on the horrors cuddled in its old bosom.'

'We thought we'd come down after you, sir,' said Mr. Fern's voice at that moment.

Mrs. Fern was with him. I made way for her to stand before the stone. Her calm eyes studied the words upon it, as though they were the features of her daughter's face. Mr. Fern stooped to pick a violet, and he gave it to his wife.

And in tender silence the fresh spring wind breathed upon our lips the murmurs of its youth, and gently brushed the grave of a young life which had blossomed and died like a flower of spring.

SANDY THE TINKER.

‘BEFORE commencing my story, I wish to state it is perfectly true in every particular.’

‘We quite understand that,’ said the sceptic of our party, who was wont, in the security of friendly intercourse, to characterise all such prefaces as mere introductions to some tremendous blank, blank, blank, which trio the reader can fill up at his own pleasure and leisure.

On the occasion in question, however, we had donned our best behaviour, a garment which did not sit ungracefully on some of us; and our host, who was about to draw out from the stores of memory one narrative for our entertainment, was scarcely the person before whom even Jack Hill would have cared to express his cynical and unbelieving views.

We were seated, an incongruous company of ten persons, in the best room of an old manse among the Scottish hills. Accident had thrown us together, and accident had driven us under the minister’s hospitable roof. Cold, wet, and hungry, drenched with rain, sorely beaten by the wind, we had crowded through the door opened by a friendly hand, and now, wet no longer, the pangs of hunger assuaged with smoking rashers of ham, poached eggs, and steaming potatoes, we sat around a blazing fire drinking toddy out of tumblers, whilst the two ladies who graced the assemblage partook of a modicum of the same beverage from wine-glasses.

Everything was eminently comfortable, but done upon the most correct principles. Jack could no

more have taken it upon him to shock the minister’s ear with some of the opinions he aired in Fleet-street than he could have asked for more whisky with his water.

‘Yes, it is perfectly true,’ continued the minister, looking thoughtfully at the fire. ‘I can’t explain it. I cannot even try to explain it. I will tell the story exactly as it occurred, and leave you to draw your own deductions from it.’

None of us answered. We fell into listening attitudes instantly, and eighteen eyes fixed themselves by one accord upon our host.

He was an old man, but hale. The weight of eighty winters had whitened his head, but not bent it. He seemed young as any of us—younger than Jack Hill, who was a reviewer and a newspaper hack, and whose way through life had not been altogether on easy lines.

‘Thirty years ago, upon a certain Friday morning in August,’ began the minister, ‘I was sitting at breakfast in the room on the other side of the passage where you ate your supper, when the servant-girl came in with a letter she said a laddie, all out of breath, had brought over from Dendeldy Manse. “He was bidden rin a’ the way,” she went on, “and he’s fairly beaten.”’

‘I told her to make the messenger sit down, and put food before him; and then, when she went to do my bidding, proceeded, I must confess with some curiosity, to break the seal of a missive forwarded in such hot haste.

'It was from the minister at Dendeldy, who had been newly chosen to occupy the pulpit his father occupied for a quarter of a century and more.

'The call from the congregation originated rather out of respect to the father's memory than any extraordinary liking for the son. He had been reared for the most part in England, and was somewhat distant and formal in his manners; and, though full of Greek and Latin and Hebrew, wanted the true Scotch accent that goes straight to the heart of those accustomed to the broad, honest, tender Scottish tongue.

'His people were proud of him, but they did not just like all his ways. They could remember him a lad running about the whole country-side, and they could not understand, and did not approve of, his holding them at arm's-length and shutting himself up among his books, and refusing their hospitality, and sending out word he was busy when maybe some very decent man wanted speech of him. I had taken upon myself to point out that I thought he was wrong, and that he would alienate his flock from him. Perhaps it was for this very reason, because I was blunt and plain, he took to me kindly, and never got on his high horse, no matter what I said to him.

'Well, to return to the letter. It was written in the wildest haste, and entreated me not to lose a moment in coming to him, as he was in the very *greatest distress* and *anxiety*. "Let *nothing* delay you," he proceeded. "If I cannot speak to you soon I believe I shall go out of my senses."

"What could be the matter?" I thought. "What, in all the wide earth, could have happened?"

'I had seen him but a few days before, and he was in good health

and spirits, getting on better with his people, feeling hopeful of so altering his style of preaching as to touch their hearts more sensibly.

"I must lay aside Southern ideas as well as accent, if I can," he went on, smiling. "Men who live such lives of hardship and privation, who cast their seed into the ground under such rigorous skies, and cut their corn in fear and trembling at the end of late uncertain summers, who take the sheep out of the snow-drifts and carry the lambs into shelter beside their own humble hearths, must want a different sort of sermon from him who sleeps soft and walks delicately."

'I had implied something of all this myself, and it amused me to find my own thoughts come back clothed in different fashion and presented to me as strangers. Still, all I wanted was his good, and I felt glad he showed such aptitude to learn.

'What could have happened, however, puzzled me sorely. As I made my hurried preparations for setting out I fairly perplexed myself with speculation. I went into the kitchen, where his messenger was eating some breakfast, and asked him if Mr. Cawley was ill.

"I dinna ken," he answered. "He mad' no complaint, but he luiked awfu' bad, just awfu'."

"In what way?" I inquired.

"As if he had seen a ghaist," was the reply.

'This made me very uneasy, and I jumped to the conclusion the trouble was connected with money matters. Young men will be young men; and here the minister looked significantly at the callow bird of our company, a youth who had never owed a sixpence in his life or given away a cent; while Jack Hill—no chicken,

by the way—was over head and ears in debt, and could not keep a sovereign in his pocket, though spending or bestowing it involved going dinnerless the next day.

‘Young men will be young men,’ repeated the minister, in his best pulpit manner (‘Just as though any one expected them to be young women!’ grumbled Jack to me afterwards), ‘and I feared that now he was settled and comfortably off some old creditor he had been paying as best he could might have become pressing. I knew nothing of his liabilities or, beyond the amount of the stipend paid him, the state of his pecuniary affairs; but having once in my own life made myself responsible for a debt, I was aware of all the trouble putting your arm out further than you can draw it back involves, and I considered it most probably money, which is the root of all evil’ (‘and all good,’ Jack’s eyes suggested to me), ‘was the cause of my young friend’s agony of mind. Blessed with a large family—every one of whom is now alive and doing well, I thank God, out in the world—you may imagine I had not much opportunity for laying by; still, I had put aside a little for a rainy day, and that little I placed in my pocket-book, hoping even a small sum might prove of use in case of emergency.’

‘Come, you *are* a trump,’ I saw written plainly on Jack Hill’s face; and he settled himself to listen to the remainder of the minister’s story in a manner which could not be considered other than complimentary.

Duly and truly I knew quite well he had already devoted the first five-guinea cheque he received to the poor of that minister’s parish.

‘By the road,’ proceeded our host, ‘Dendeldy is distant from here ten long miles, but by a short

cut across the hills it can be reached in something under six. For me it was nothing of a walk, and accordingly I arrived at the manse ere noon.’

He paused, and, though thirty years had elapsed, drew a handkerchief across his forehead ere he continued his narrative.

‘I had to climb a steep brae to reach the front door, but ere I could breast it my friend met me.

“Thank God you are come,” he said, pressing my hand in his. “O, I am grateful.”

‘He was trembling with excitement. His face was of a ghastly pallor. His voice was that of a person suffering from some terrible shock, labouring under some awful fear.

“What *has* happened, Edward?” I asked. I had known him when he was a little boy. “I am distressed to see you in such a state. Rouse yourself; be a man; whatever may have gone wrong can possibly be righted. I have come over to do all that lies in my power for you. If it is a matter of money—”

“No, no; it is not money,” he interrupted; “would that it were!” and he began to tremble again so violently that really he communicated some part of his nervousness to me, and put me into a state of perfect terror.

“Whatever it is, Cawley, out with it,” I said; “have you murdered anybody?”

“No, it is worse than that,” he answered.

“But that’s just nonsense,” I declared. “Are you in your right mind, do you think?”

“I wish I were not,” he returned. “I’d like to know I was stark staring mad; it would be happier for me—far, far happier.”

“If you don’t tell me this minute what is the matter, I shall turn on my heel and tramp my

way home again," I said, half in a passion, for what I thought his folly angered me.

"Come into the house," he entreated, "and try to have patience with me; for indeed, Mr. Morison, I am sorely troubled. I have been through my deep waters, and they have gone clean over my head."

'We went into his little study and sat down. For a while he remained silent, his head resting upon his hand, struggling with some strong emotion; but after about five minutes he asked, in a low subdued voice,

"Do you believe in dreams?"

"What has my belief to do with the matter in hand?" I inquired.

"It is a dream, an awful dream, that is troubling me."

'I rose from my chair.

"Do you mean to say," I asked, "you have brought me from my business and my parish to tell me you have had a bad dream?"

"That is just what I do mean to say," he answered. "At least, it was not a dream—it was a vision; no, I don't mean a vision. I can't tell you what it was; but nothing I ever went through in actual life was half so real, and I have bound myself to go through it all again. There is no hope for me, Mr. Morison. I sit before you a lost creature, the most miserable man on the face of the whole earth."

"What did you dream?" I inquired.

'A dreadful fit of trembling again seized him; but at last he managed to say,

"I have been like this ever since, and I shall be like this for evermore, till — till — the end comes."

"When did you have your bad dream?" I asked.

"Last night, or rather, this morning," he answered. "I'll tell

you all about it in a minute;" and he covered his face with his hands again.

"I was as well when I went to bed about eleven o'clock as ever I was in my life," he began, putting a great restraint upon himself, as I could see by the nervous way he kept knotting and unknotting his fingers. "I had been considering my sermon, and felt satisfied I should be able to deliver a good one on Sunday morning. I had taken nothing after my tea, and I lay down in my bed feeling at peace with all mankind, satisfied with my lot, thankful for the many blessings vouchsafed to me. How long I slept, or what I dreamt about at first, if I dreamt at all, I don't know; but after a time the mists seemed to clear from before my eyes, to roll away like clouds from a mountain summit, and I found myself walking on a beautiful summer's evening beside the river Deldy."

'He paused for a moment, and an irrepressible shudder shook his frame.

"Go on," I said, for I felt afraid of his breaking down again.

'He looked at me pitifully, with a hungry entreaty in his weary eyes, and continued,

"It was a lovely evening. I had never thought the earth so beautiful before: a gentle breeze just touched my cheek, the water flowed on clear and bright, the mountains in the distance looked bright and glowing, covered with purple heather. I walked on and on till I came to that point where, as you may perhaps remember, the path, growing very narrow, winds round the base of a great crag, and leads the wayfarer suddenly into a little green amphitheatre, bounded on one side by the river and on the other by rocks that rise in places sheer to a height of a hundred feet and more."

"I remember it," I said; "a little farther on three streams meet and fall with a tremendous roar into the Witches' Caldron. A fine sight in the winter-time, only that there is scarce any reaching it from below, as the path you mention and the little green oasis are mostly covered with water."

"I had not been there before since I was a child," he went on mournfully, "but I recollected it as one of the most solitary spots possible; and my astonishment was great to see a man standing in the pathway with a drawn sword in his hand. He did not stir as I drew near, so I stepped aside on the grass. Instantly he barred my way.

"'You can't pass here,' he said.

"'Why not?' I asked.

"'Because I say so,' he answered.

"'And who are you that say so?' I inquired, looking full at him.

"He was like a god. Majesty and power were written on every feature, were expressed in every gesture; but O, the awful scorn of his smile, the contempt with which he regarded me! The beams of the setting sun fell full upon him, and seemed to bring out as in letters of fire the wickedness and hate and sin that underlay the glorious and terrible beauty of his face.

"I felt afraid; but I managed to say,

"'Stand out of my way; the river-bank is as free to me as to you.'

"'Not this part of it,' he answered; 'this place belongs to me.'

"'Very well,' I agreed, for I did not want to stand there bandying words with him, and a sudden darkness seemed to be falling around. 'It is getting late, and so I'll e'en turn back.'

"He gave a laugh, the like of

which never fell on human ear before, and made reply,

"'You can't turn back; of your own free will you have come on my ground, and from it there is no return.'

"I did not speak; I only just turned round, and made as fast as I could for the narrow path at the foot of the crag. He did not pass me; yet before I could reach the point I desired he stood barring the way, with the scornful smile still on his lips, and his gigantic form assuming tremendous proportions in the narrow way.

"'Let me pass,' I entreated, 'and I will never come here again, never trespass more on your ground.'

"'No, you shall not pass.'

"'Who are you that takes such power on yourself?' I asked.

"'Come closer, and I will tell you,' he said.

"I drew a step nearer, and he spoke one word. I had never heard it before; but I knew what it meant, by some extraordinary intuition. He was the Evil One; the name seemed to be taken up by the echoes and repeated from rock to rock and crag to crag; the whole air seemed full of that one word; and then a great horror of darkness came about us, only the place where we stood remained light. We occupied a small circle walled round with the thick blackness of night.

"'You must come with me,' he said.

"I refused; and then he threatened me. I implored and entreated and wept; but at last I agreed to do what he wanted if he would promise to let me return. Again he laughed, and said, Yes, I should return; and the rocks and trees and mountains, ay, and the very rivers, seemed to take up the answer, and bear it in sobbing whispers away into the darkness."

'He stopped and lay back in his chair, shivering like one in an ague fit.

"Go on," I repeated again ;
"'twas but a dream, you know."

"Was it?" he murmured mournfully. "Ah, you have not heard the end of it yet."

"Let me hear it, then," I said.
"What happened afterwards?"

"The darkness seemed in part to clear away, and we walked side by side across the sward in the tender twilight straight up to the bare black wall of rock. With the hilt of his sword he struck a heavy blow, and the solid rock opened as though it were a door. We passed through, and it closed behind us with a tremendous clang; yes, it closed behind us;" and at that point he fairly broke down, crying and sobbing as I had never seen a man even in the most frightful grief cry and sob before.'

The minister paused in his narrative. At that moment there came a most tremendous blast of wind, which shook the windows of the manse, and burst open the hall-door, and caused the candles to flicker and the fire to go roaring up the chimney. It is not too much to say that, what with the uncanny story, and what with the howling storm, we every one felt that creeping sort of uneasiness which so often seems like the touch of something from another world—a hand stretched across the boundary-line of time and eternity the coldness and mystery of which make the stoutest heart tremble.

'I am telling you this tale,' said Mr. Morison, resuming his seat after a brief absence to see that the fastenings of the house were properly attended to, 'exactly as I heard it. I am not adding a word or comment of my own; nor, so far as I know, am I omitting any incident, however trivial. You

must draw your own deductions from the facts I put before you. I have no explanation to give or theory to propound. Part of that great and terrible region in which he found himself, my friend went on to tell me, he penetrated, compelled by a power he could not resist to see the most awful spectacles, the most frightful sufferings. There was no form of vice that had not there its representative. As they moved along his companion told him the special sin for which such horrible punishment was being inflicted. Shuddering, and in mortal agony, he was yet unable to withdraw his eyes from the dreadful spectacle; the atmosphere grew more unendurable, the sights more and more terrible; the cries, groans, blasphemies, more awful and heartrending.

"I can bear no more," he gasped at last; "let me go!"

'With a mocking laugh the Presence beside him answered this appeal; a laugh which was taken up even by the lost and anguished spirits around.

"There is no return," said the pitiless voice.

"But you promised," he cried;
"you promised me faithfully."

"What are promises here?" and the words were as the sound of doom.

'Still he prayed and entreated; he fell on his knees, and in his agony spoke words that seemed to cause the purpose of the Evil One to falter.

"You shall go," he said, "on one condition: that you agree to return to me on Wednesday next, or send a substitute."

"I could not do that," said my friend. "I could not send any fellow-creature here. Better stop myself than do that."

"Then stop," said Satan, with the bitterest contempt; and he was turning away, when the poor

distracted soul asked for a minute more ere he made his choice.

‘He was in an awful strait: on the one hand, how could he remain himself? on the other, how doom another to such fearful torments? Who could he send? Who would come? And then suddenly there flashed through his mind the thought of an old man to whom it could not signify much whether he took up his abode in this place a few days sooner or a few days later. He was travelling to it as fast as he knew how; he was the reprobate of the parish; the sinner without hope successive ministers had striven in vain to reclaim from the error of his ways; a man marked and doomed; Sandy the Tinker; Sandy, who was mostly drunk, and always godless; Sandy, who, it was said, believed in nothing, and gloried in his infidelity; Sandy, whose soul really did not signify much. He would send him. Lifting his eyes, he saw those of his tormentor surveying him scornfully.’

“Well, have you made your choice?” he asked.

“Yes; I think I can send a substitute,” was the hesitating answer.

“See you do, then,” was the reply; “for if you do not, and fail to return yourself, *I shall come for you.* Wednesday, remember, before midnight;” and with these words ringing in his ears he was flung violently through the rock, and found himself in the middle of his bedroom floor, as if he had just been kicked there.’

‘That is not the end of the story, is it?’ asked one of our party, as the minister came to a full stop, and looked earnestly at the fire.

‘No,’ he answered, ‘it is not the end; but before proceeding I must ask you to bear carefully in mind the circumstances already

recounted. Specially remember the date mentioned—*Wednesday next, before midnight.*

‘Whatever I thought, and you may think, about my friend’s dream, it made the most remarkable impression upon *his* mind. He could not shake off its influence; he passed from one state of nervousness to another. It was in vain I entreated him to exert his common sense and call all his strength of mind to his assistance. I might as well have spoken to the wind. He implored me not to leave him, and I agreed to remain; indeed, to leave him in his then frame of mind would have been an act of the greatest cruelty. He wanted me also to preach in his place on the Sunday ensuing; but this I flatly refused to do.

“If you do not make an effort now,” I said, “you will never make it. Rouse yourself, get on with your sermon, and if you buckle to work you will soon forget all about that foolish dream.”

‘Well, somehow, to cut a long story short, the sermon was composed, and Sunday came; and my friend, a little better, and getting somewhat over his fret, got up into the pulpit to preach. He looked dreadfully ill; but I thought the worst was now over, and that he would go on mending.

‘Vain hope! He gave out the text and then looked over the congregation: the first person on whom his eyes lighted was Sandy the Tinker—Sandy, who had never before been known to enter a place of worship of any sort; Sandy, whom he had mentally chosen as his substitute, and who was *due on the following Wednesday*—sitting just below him, quite sober and comparatively clean, waiting with a great show of attention for the opening words of the sermon.

‘With a terrible cry, my friend caught the front of the pulpit, then

swayed back, and fell down in a fainting fit. He was carried home and a doctor sent for. I said a few words, addressed apparently to the congregation, but really to Sandy, for my heart somehow came into my mouth at sight of him; and then, after I dismissed the people, I walked slowly back to the manse, almost afraid of what might meet me there.

‘Mr. Cawley was not dead; but he was in the most dreadful state of physical exhaustion and mental agitation. It was dreadful to hear him. How could he go himself? How could he send Sandy?—poor old Sandy, whose soul, in the sight of God, was just as precious as his own.

‘His whole cry was for us to deliver him from the Evil One; to save him from committing a sin which would render him a wretched man for life. He counted the hours and the minutes before he must return to that horrible place.

“I can’t send Sandy,” he would moan. “I cannot, O, I cannot save myself at such a price!”

‘And then he would cover his face with the bedclothes, only to start up and wildly entreat me not to leave him; to stand between the enemy and himself, to save him, or, if that were impossible, to give him courage to do what was right.

“If this continues,” said the doctor, “Wednesday will find him either dead or a raving lunatic.”

‘We talked the matter over, the doctor and I, in the gloaming, as we walked to and fro in the meadow behind the manse; and we decided, having to make our choice of two evils, to risk giving him such an opiate as should carry him over the dreaded interval. We knew it was a perilous thing to do with one in his condi-

tion, but, as I said before, we could only take the least of two evils.

‘What we dreaded most was his awaking before the time expired; so I kept watch beside him. He lay like one dead through the whole of Tuesday night and Wednesday and Wednesday evening. Eight, nine, ten, eleven o’clock came and passed; twelve. “God be thanked!” I said, as I stooped over him and heard he was breathing quietly.

“He will do now, I hope,” said the doctor, who had come in just before midnight; “you will stay with him till he wakes?”

‘I promised that I would, and in the beautiful dawn of a summer’s morning he opened his eyes and smiled. He had no recollection then of what had occurred; he was as weak as an infant, and when I bade him try to go to sleep again, turned on his pillow and sank to rest once more.

‘Worn out with watching, I stepped softly from the room and passed into the fresh sweet air. I walked down to the garden-gate, and stood looking at the great mountains and the fair country, and the Deldy wandering like a silver thread through the green fields below.

‘All at once my attention was attracted by a group of people coming slowly along the road leading from the hills. I could not at first see that in their midst something was being borne on men’s shoulders; but when at last I made this out, I hurried to meet them and learn what was the matter.

“Has there been an accident?” I asked as I drew near.

They stopped, and one man came towards me.

“Ay,” he said, “the warst accident that could befa’ him, puir fella’. He’s deid.”

"Who is it?" I asked, pressing forward; and lifting the cloth they had flung over his face, I saw *Sandy the Tinker!*

"He had been fou' coming home, I tak' it," remarked one who stood by, "puir Sandy, and gaed over the cliff afore he could save himsel'. We found him just on this side of the Witches' Caldron, where there's a bonny strip of green turf, and his cuddy was feeding on the hill-top with the bit cart behind her."'

There was silence for a minute; then one of the ladies said softly, 'Poor Sandy!'

'And what became of Mr. Cawley?' asked the other.

'He gave up his parish and went out as missionary. He is still living.'

'What a most extraordinary story!' I remarked.

'Yes, *I* think so,' said the minister. 'If you like to go round by Dendeldy to-morrow, my son, who now occupies the manse, would show you the scene of the occurrence.'

The next day we all stood looking at the 'bonny strip of green, at the frowning cliffs, and at the Deldy, swollen by recent rains, rushing on its way.

The youngest of the party went up to the rock, and knocked upon it loudly with his cane.

'O, don't do that, pray!' cried both the ladies nervously; the spirit of the weird story still brooded over us.

'What do you think of the coincidence, Jack?' I inquired of my friend, as we walked apart from the others.

'Ask me when we get back to Fleet-street,' he answered.

THE AMERICAN'S TALE.

'It air strange, it air,' he was saying as I opened the door of the room where our social little semi-literary society met; 'but I could tell you queerer things than that 'ere—almighty queer things. You can't learn everything out of books, sirs, nohow. You see it ain't the men as can string English together and as has had good eddications as finds themselves in the queer places I've been in. They're mostly rough men, sirs, as can scarce speak aright, far less tell with pen and ink the things they've seen; but if they could they'd make some of your European's har riz with astonishment. They would, sirs, you bet!'

His name was Jefferson Adams, I believe; I know his initials were J. A., for you may see them yet deeply whittled on the right-hand upper panel of our smoking-room door. He left us this legacy, and also some artistic patterns done in tobacco-juice upon our Turkey carpet; but beyond these reminiscences our American storyteller has vanished from our ken. He gleamed across our ordinary quiet conviviality like some brilliant meteor, and then was lost in the outer darkness. That night, however, our Nevada friend was in full swing; and I quietly lit my pipe and dropped into the nearest chair, anxious not to interrupt his story.

'Mind you,' he continued, 'I hain't got no grudge against your men of science. I likes and respects a chap as can match every beast and plant, from a huckleberry to a grizzly with a jaw-breakin' name; but if you wants real interestin' facts, something a bit juicy, you go to your whalers and your frontiersmen, and your scouts

and Hudson Bay men, chaps who mostly can scarce sign their names.'

There was a pause here, as Mr. Jefferson Adams produced a long cheroot and lit it. We preserved a strict silence in the room, for we had already learned that on the slightest interruption our Yankee drew himself into his shell again. He glanced round with a self-satisfied smile as he remarked our expectant looks, and continued through a halo of smoke,

'Now which of you gentlemen has ever been in Arizona? None, I'll warrant. And of all English or Americans as can put pen to paper, how many has been in Arizona? Precious few, I calc'late. I've been there, sirs, lived there for years; and when I think of what I've seen there, why, I can scarce get myself to believe it now.

'Ah, there's a country! I was one of Walker's filibusters, as they chose to call us; and after we'd busted up, and the chief was shot, some on us made tracks and located down there. A reg'lar English and American colony, we was, with our wives and children, and all complete. I reckon there's some of the old folk there yet, and that they hain't forgotten what I'm agoing to tell you. No, I warrant they hain't, never on this side of the grave, sirs.

'I was talking about the country, though; and I guess I could astonish you considerable if I spoke of nothing else. To think of such a land being built for a few "Greasers" and half-breeds! It's a misusing of the gifts of Providence, that's what I calls it. Grass as hung over a chap's head as he rode through it, and trees so thick that you couldn't

catch a glimpse of blue sky for leagues and leagues, and orchids like umbrellas! Maybe some on you has seen a plant as they calls the "fly-catcher," in some parts of the States?"

'*Diancea muscipula*,' murmured Dawson, our scientific man *par excellence*.

'Ah, "Die near a municipal," that's him! You'll see a fly stand on that 'ere plant, and then you'll see the two sides of a leaf snap up together and catch it between them, and grind it up and mash it to bits, for all the world like some great sea squid with its beak; and hours after, if you open the leaf, you'll see the body lying half-digested, and in bits. Well, I've seen those flytraps in Arizona with leaves eight and ten feet long, and thorns or teeth a foot or more; why, they could— But darn it, I'm going too fast!

'It's about the death of Joe Hawkins I was going to tell you; 'bout as queer a thing, I reckon, as ever you heard tell on. There wasn't nobody in Montana as didn't know of Joe Hawkins—"Alabama" Joe, as he was called there. A reg'lar out and outer, he was, 'bout the darndest skunk as ever man clapt eyes on. He was a good chap enough, mind ye, as long as you stroked him the right way; but rile him anyhow, and he were worse nor a wild-cat. I've seen him empty his six-shooter into a crowd as chanced to jostle him agoing into Simpson's bar when there was a dance on; and he bowied Tom Hooper 'cause he spilt his liquor over his weskit by mistake. No, he didn't stick at murder, Joe didn't; and he weren't a man to be trusted further nor you could see him.

'Now at the time I tell on, when Joe Hawkins was swaggerin' about the town and layin' down the law with his shootin'-irons, there

was an Englishman there of the name of Scott—Tom Scott, if I rec'lects aright. This chap Scott was a thorough Britisher (beggin' the present company's pardon), and yet he didn't freeze much to the British set there, or they didn't freeze much to him. He was a quiet simple man, Scott was—rather too quiet for a rough set like that; sneakin' they called him, but he weren't that. He kept hisself mostly apart, an' didn't interfere with nobody so long as he were left alone. Some said as how he'd been kinder ill-treated at home—been a Chartist, or something of that sort, and had to up stick and run; but he never spoke of it hisself, an' never complained. Bad luck or good, that chap kept a stiff lip on him.

'This chap Scott was a sort o' butt among the men about Montana, for he was so quiet an' simple-like. There was no party either to take up his grievances; for, as I've been saying, the Britishers hardly counted him one of them, and many a rough joke they played on him. He never cut up rough, but was polite to all hisself. I think the boys got to think he hadn't much grit in him till he showed 'em their mistake.

'It was in Simpson's bar as the row got up, an' that led to the queer thing I was going to tell you of. Alabama Joe and one or two other rowdies were dead on the Britishers in those days, and they spoke their opinions pretty free, though I warned them as there'd be an almighty muss. That partic'lar night Joe was nigh half drunk, an' he swaggered about the town with his six-shooter, lookin' out for a quarrel. Then he turned into the bar where he know'd he'd find some o' the English as ready for one as he was hisself. Sure enough, there was half a dozen lounging about, an'

Tom Scott standin' alone before the stove. Joe sat down by the table, and put his revolver and bowie down in front of him. "Them's my arguments, Jeff," he says to me, "if any white-livered Britisher dares give me the lie." I tried to stop him, sirs; but he weren't a man as you could easily turn, an' he began to speak in a way as no chap could stand. Why, even a "Greaser" would flare up if you said as much of Greaserland! There was a commotion at the bar, an' every man laid his hands on his wepin's; but afore they could draw we heard a quiet voice from the stove: "Say your prayers, Joe Hawkins; for, by Heaven, you're a dead man!" Joe turned round, and looked like grabbin' at his iron; but it weren't no manner of use. Tom Scott was standing up, covering him with his Derringer; a smile on his white face, but the very devil shining in his eye. "It ain't that the old country has used me over-well," he says, "but no man shall speak agin it afore me, and live." For a second or two I could see his finger tighten round the trigger, an' then he gave a laugh, an' threw the pistol on the floor. "No," he says, "I can't shoot a half-drunk man. Take your dirty life, Joe, an' use it better nor you have done. You've been nearer the grave this night than you will be agin until your time comes. You'd best make tracks now, I guess. Nay, never look black at me, man; I'm not afeard at your shootin'-iron. A bully's nigh always a coward." And he swung contemptuously round, and relit his half-smoked pipe from the stove; while Alabama slunk out o' the bar, with the laughs of the Britishers ringing in his ears. I saw his face as he passed me, and on it I saw murder, sirs—murder, as plain as ever I seed anything in my life.

'I stayed in the bar after the row, and watched Tom Scott as he shook hands with the men about. It seemed kinder queer to me to see him smilin' and cheerful-like; for I knew Joe's bloodthirsty mind, and that the Englishman had small chance of ever seeing the morning. He lived in an out-of-the-way sort of place, you see, clean off the trail, and had to pass through the Flytrap Gulch to get to it. This here gulch was a marshy gloomy place, lonely enough during the day even; for it were always a creepy sort o' thing to see the great eight- and ten-foot leaves snapping up if aught touched them; but at night there were never a soul near. Some parts of the marsh, too, were soft and deep, and a body thrown in would be gone by the morning. I could see Alabama Joe crouchin' under the leaves of the great Flytrap in the darkest part of the gulch, with a scowl on his face and a revolver in his hand; I could see it, sirs, as plain as with my two eyes.

'Bout midnight Simpson shuts up his bar, so out we had to go. Tom Scott started off for his three-mile walk at a slashing pace. I just dropped him a hint as he passed me, for I kinder liked the chap. "Keep your Derringer loose in your belt, sir," I says, "for you might chance to need it." He looked round at me with his quiet smile, and then I lost sight of him in the gloom. I never thought to see him again. He'd hardly gone afore Simpson comes up to me and says, "There'll be a nice job in the Flytrap Gulch to-night, Jeff; the boys say that Hawkins started half an hour ago to wait for Scott and shoot him on sight. I calc'late the coroner 'll be wanted to-morrow."

'What passed in the gulch that night? It were a question as were asked pretty free next morning. A half-breed was in Ferguson's

store after daybreak, and he said as he'd chanced to be near the gulch 'bout one in the morning. It warn't easy to get at his story, he seemed so uncommon scared; but he told us, at last, as he'd heard the fearfulest screams in the stillness of the night. There weren't no shots, he said, but scream after scream, kinder muffled, like a man with a serapó over his head, an' in mortal pain. Abner Brandon and me, and a few more, was in the store at the time; so we mounted and rode out to Scott's house, passing through the gulch on the way. There weren't nothing partic'lar to be seen there—no blood nor marks of a fight, nor nothing; and when we gets up to Scott's house, out he comes to meet us as fresh as a lark. "Hullo, Jeff!" says he, "no need for the pistols after all. Come in an' have a cocktail, boys." "Did ye see or hear nothing as ye came home last night?" says I. "No," says he; "all was quiet enough. An owl kinder moaning in the Flytrap Gulch—that was all. Come, jump off and have a glass." "Thank ye," says Abner. So off we gets, and Tom Scott rode into the settlement with us when we went back.

'An allfired commotion was on in Main-street as we rode into it. The 'Merican party seemed to have gone clean crazed. Alabama Joe was gone, not a darned particle of him left. Since he went out to the gulch nary eye had seen him. As we got off our horses there was a considerable crowd in front of Simpson's, and some ugly looks at Tom Scott, I can tell you. There was a clickin' of pistols, and I saw as Scott had his hand in his bosom too. There weren't a single English face about. "Stand aside, Jeff Adams," says Zebb Humphrey, as great a scoundrel as ever lived, "you hain't got no hand in this game. Say, boys, are we, free

Americans, to be murdered by any darned Britisher?" It was the quickest thing as ever I seed. There was a rush an' a crack; Zebb was down, with Scott's ball in his thigh, and Scott hisself was on the ground with a dozen men holdin' him. It weren't no use struggling, so he lay quiet. They seemed a bit uncertain what to do with him at first, but then one of Alabama's special chums put them up to it. "Joe's gone," he said; "nothing ain't surer nor that, an' there lies the man as killed him. Some on you knows as Joe went on business to the gulch last night; he never came back. That 'ere Britisher passed through after he'd gone; they'd had a row, screams is heard 'mong the great flytraps. I say agin he has played poor Joe some o' his sneakin' tricks, an' thrown him into the swamp. It ain't no wonder as the body is gone. But air we to stan' by and see English murderin' our own chums? I guess not. Let Judge Lynch try him, that's what I say." "Lynch him?" shouted a hundred angry voices—for all the rag-tag an' bobtail o' the settlement was round us by this time. "Here, boys, fetch a rope, and swing him up. Up with him over Simpson's door!" "See here though," says another, coming forrards; "let's hang him by the great flytrap in the gulch. Let Joe see as he's revenged, if so be as he's buried 'bout theer." There was a shout for this, an' away they went, with Scott tied on his mustang in the middle, and a mounted guard, with cocked revolvers, round him; for we knew as there was a score or so Britishers about, as didn't seem to recognise Judge Lynch, and was dead on a free fight.

'I went out with them, my heart bleedin' for Scott, though he didn't seem a cent put out, he didn't. He were game to the backbone. Seems

kinder queer, sirs, hangin' a man to a flytrap; but our'n were a reg'lar tree, and the leaves like a brace of boats with a hinge between 'em and thorns at the bottom.

'We passed down the gulch to the place where the great one grows, and there we seed it with the leaves, some open, some shut. But we seed something worse nor that. Standin' round the tree was some thirty men, Britishers all, an' armed to the teeth. They was waitin' for us evidently, an' had a businesslike look about 'em, as if they'd come for something and meant to have it. There was the raw material there for about as warm a scrimmage as ever I seed. As we rode up, a great red-bearded Scotchman—Cameron were his name—stood out afore the rest, his revolver cocked in his hand. "See here, boys," he says, "you've got no call to hurt a hair of that man's head. You hain't proved as Joe is dead yet; and if you had, you hain't proved as Scott killed him. Anyhow, it were in self-defence; for you all know as he was lying in wait for Scott, to shoot him on sight; so I say agin, you hain't got no call to hurt that man; and what's more, I've got thirty six-barrelled arguments against your doin' it." "It's an interestin' pint, and worth arguin' out," said the man as was Alabama Joe's special chum. There was a clickin' of pistols, and a loosenin' of knives, and the two parties began to draw up to one another, an' it looked like a rise in the mortality of Montana. Scott was standing behind with a pistol at his ear if he stirred, lookin' quiet and composed as having no money on the table, when sudden he gives a start an' a shout as rang in our ears like a trumpet. "Joe!" he cried, "Joe! Look at him! In the flytrap!" We all turned an' looked where he was pointin'. Je-

rusalem! I think we won't get that picter out of our minds agin. One of the great leaves of the fly-trap, that had been shut and touchin' the ground as it lay, was slowly rolling back upon its hinges. There, lying like a child in its cradle, was Alabama Joe in the hollow of the leaf. The great thorns had been slowly driven through his heart as it shut upon him. We could see as he'd tried to cut his way out, for there was a slit in the thick fleshy leaf, an' his bowie was in his hand; but it had smothered him first. He'd lain down on it likely to keep the damp off while he were awaitin' for Scott, and it had closed on him as you've seen your little hothouse ones do on a fly; an' there he were as we found him, torn and crushed into pulp by the great jagged teeth of the man-eatin' plant. There, sirs, I think you'll own as that's a curious story.'

'And what became of Scott?' asked Jack Sinclair.

'Why, we carried him back on our shoulders, we did, to Simpson's bar, and he stood us liquors round. Made a speech too—a darned fine speech—from the counter. Somethin' about the British lion an' the 'Merican eagle walkin' arm in arm for ever an' a day.' And now, sirs, that yarn was long, and my cheroot's out, so I reckon I'll make tracks afore it's later; and with a 'Good-night!' he left the room.

'A most extraordinary narrative!' said Dawson. 'Who would have thought a Diancea had such power?'

'Deuced rum yarn!' said young Sinclair.

'Evidently a matter-of-fact truthful man,' said the doctor.

'Or the most original liar that ever lived,' said I.

I wonder which he was.

SEEN IN THE MIRROR.

A Real Ghost Story.

I.

It was optional with me, of course, to refuse or to accept; but somehow I adopted the latter course. I suppose it was easier to write a letter of acquiescence than of apology; or possibly the latent curiosity which I had kept in check for so long had asserted itself at last, to the defeat of reason and resolution.

Three years before I had spent a week at Forrest Hall; and when I brought my stay to an abrupt conclusion, I had all but registered a mental vow that I would never repeat the experiment of a visit again. Yet Mr. Forrester, my host, had been courteous, even cordial; his wife showed herself as agreeable as a foreigner, who spoke English but imperfectly, could be; and there was no other visible inmate of the house to give umbrage or disturbance. The adjective may seem expressive; but if it is taken to imply that I suffered annoyance from nocturnal visitants of a spiritual cast, it says too much. It was not thus that my seven days' sojourn at the hall was rendered irritable and almost unendurable. But I need not pause upon a matter which will naturally unfold itself later.

It was on the eve of Christmas-day that I drove beneath the ivied portal which gave entrance to the romantic old place that I had once looked upon as my own. It had belonged, a few years before, to my uncle, Mr. Geoffrey Forrester. He had never married; I was his favourite nephew; and

though the son of his youngest brother, it had been an assumed, almost settled, thing, that I, George Forrester, was to be his heir. The disappointment in these expectations came to me before that ominous and momentous day when the will was opened. Some months before my uncle's decease, I divined that his intentions respecting the disposal of his property had varied, and that for no fault of mine, but through a sudden favour shown to another, changes were made, which were to work strangely on my after-life. The son of his eldest brother came back from a long residence in Italy, with an only and very lovely young daughter. They were naturally invited to Forrest Hall; and before the visit ended I knew that a former estrangement between the uncle and nephew was dissipated by the friendly intercourse of the present, and more especially and entirely by the fascination exercised over the old gentleman by the winning brightness and beauty of Lucia Forrester. Her mother was an Italian, and was still in her own country, while the father and daughter paid this visit of policy to the fast-failing owner of Forrest Hall. They remained with him to the last, and it was found then that, with the exception of a small bequest to myself, the whole of my uncle's property was willed to his elder nephew, in reversion to his only child Lucia. I had met the latter, had spent a fortnight in the house with her, and had ad-

mitted that her power of attraction was deep and incontestable. I thought of her now as I was borne swiftly along the drive, and came presently in view of the old Elizabethan mansion, which was her home. Though the weather was bleak, with a piercing wind blowing on the open road without the demesne, here there was comparative shelter. My uncle Geoffrey had carried out one of his fancies to a successful issue, and had surrounded himself with the green and shade of summer when there was winter elsewhere. The whole grounds were planted thickly with evergreens which flourished almost like trees, so carefully had their growth and luxuriance been promoted; and now, at this Christmas season, outer decorations as well as inner might have been specially got up, judging from the glossy holly-branches, ivy-wreaths, and laurel-boughs which filled the view on all sides.

It was evening; the house was brilliantly lighted up; and as the hall-door was thrown open, the warm glow within was all the pleasanter in contrast to the frosty air and flitting moonshine which held the world in a cold spell without. Something else was more inspiring than all. It was a sight which met my eyes in the first moment of entering. A young lady was crossing the hall, and turning, just in the doorway leading to a room opposite, she gave me a smile of welcome. She was beautifully dressed in silk of a creamy shade, with some draperies of rich violet velvet, relieving an otherwise colourless picture; for the tint of her skin and hair harmonised with that of her dress, and was scarcely deeper in tone. But there was nothing insipid in a face which beamed with expression, which had bewitchingly

lovely features, and a pair of dark-blue eyes, set like stars beneath the delicate pencilling of her brows.

‘Lucia!’ I exclaimed, and sprang forwards eagerly. ‘Have we met at last?’

‘Have you come at last?’ she retorted quickly. ‘Three invitations and three refusals speak pretty fairly for our friendship, but not for yours.’

‘An invitation to a place is nothing—the people are everything,’ I said. ‘When I was last here you absented yourself strangely. Can you wonder I did not come again?’

This was the mere fact of the case. On the occasion of that former Christmas visit my cousin Lucia had not once shown herself. I was told she was ill, and I had felt bound to believe the statement, till it was strangely negatived by a sight which rendered me at once perplexed and indignant. I had started one day for a ride when something went wrong with the equipment of my steed, and I was obliged to return unexpectedly to the house. I was walking along the avenue of the hall, leading the horse by the bridle, when, in a pathway amongst the evergreens, I caught a glimpse of a well-remembered figure. The tall slight proportions, the girlish step, and the pale amber of the hair, which was rolled low upon the neck and rested on the glossy darkness of a sealskin jacket, were sufficient in themselves to identify the lady; but any doubt or bewilderment on the subject was at once dissipated by a full view of the face.

Miss Forrester had evidently heard the sound of advancing steps on the drive, for she turned suddenly. A rosy flush mounted to her brow at the moment; but before word or gesture could express questioning surprise on my part,

she was gone. Hurrying onwards I left the horse in the care of a groom, and went at once to the house. My quick inquiry for Miss Forrester was met by the reply that the young lady was still very unwell, was confined to her room, and could see no one. Half an hour later I had left Forrest Hall, anger having predominated over the feeling of mystification which might have led me to prolong my stay in the hope of dissipating it by penetration or investigation. I felt that my cousin, who was the heiress now, was determined to arrest any incipient attentions of the former heir by showing him, in the most pointed manner, her disinclination even to tolerate his presence. It was galling enough to have to return as an impoverished guest to a place where I had once hoped to dispense hospitality, on my part, without incurring the additional humiliation of being subject to an unjust suspicion. I could see nothing else in the strange withdrawal of my cousin Lucia from my society. She plainly thought I might become too audacious as a suitor, and was determined that the inheritance I had lost should not be regained through her. This was the view of her conduct which I took at the time, and which nettled me so much that when an invitation came each succeeding Christmas to spend it at Forrest Hall I refused until the present occasion.

A little silvery laugh and a sweet bewitching glance dissipated everything but a sense of entrancement now. They had been the only reply to my inquiry, but they were sufficient to arrest the questionings of the past in the view of a less-perplexing future.

I was soon in the drawing-room, to which Lucia led the way; and amid the excitement of Christmas festivities I was greeted cordially

by Mrs. Forrester and my cousin Geoffrey. My hostess was a tall thin lady, scarcely foreign-looking in appearance, as her complexion retained in a faded form the traces of a fairness almost as dazzling as her daughter's. She was still in the prime of life, but a peculiar air of feebleness was given to her aspect by the way in which she carried her head. It was always slightly on one side, was enveloped with muslin or lace ties high up about the throat, and might have been bandaged on, so nervous was its balance, and so little action was allowed to its movements. She spoke generally in italics, and emphasised her reception of me now in a way which was very gratifying.

'So glad to see you, Mr. Forrester! But you should have come before. Your absence was too bad. Did we offend you?'

I got out of the difficulty with a smile it was easy to summon up with Lucia close by, and ready, as I found, to give me her hand for the next dance.

That evening passed delightfully, though I was rendered a shade uneasy towards its close by the assiduity of a young gentleman, who seemed determined to give Miss Forrester the benefit of his entire stock of information. London and literature, the country and sports, all were brought eloquently forward to gain a hold on his companion's attention. He had been only introduced to the young lady that night, I learned; but I could see at once that he was drawing the first parallel, and that, whether effectively or not, the tactics of a siege were beginning.

The next day we had skating. Lucia was an adept in the art, and went skimming over the glassy surface as graceful as a swan on unruffled waters. I was out of practice, and was ploughing along in a

rather laboured fashion when she flew up to me.

'Do be a little more adventurous!' she exclaimed. 'The outside edge is the easiest thing in the world. Can you not cut some figures?'

'One, as you see,' I rejoined, laughing. 'My awkwardness speaks for itself; but this singular state of things supposes anything but an advance in the plural direction.'

'You are not so very bad,' she said, with a long critical look. 'Mr. Lerrington has come to grief twice already. He offered me his hand at starting, or rather made a clutch at mine, but I managed a release.'

Mr. Lerrington was the aspiring engineer who had laid himself out to be agreeable on the preceding evening, and whose sanguine nature still kept him up. He was beside us even as Miss Forrester spoke.

'*"Acmes"* are not perfection after all,' he said gaily. 'Something went wrong with mine, but I'm all right now;' and he made a successful spin. That Lucia should follow him was not a matter for surprise, but that I should be left behind was certainly one for vexation. Lucia mystified me, and therefore attracted me. I wanted to understand her, but that could scarcely be done at a distance. In the present instance I could keep my footing, though speed was beyond me; yet this plainly was the one thing desirable. Recklessness may be decried in other paths of life, but on the most slippery one of all it seems a rightful exchange for prudence, an indispensable impetus to advance.

After a while the young lady grew tired either of the exercise or the escort, and was back again with me. I am afraid I had been contemplating rashness with too fa-

vourable an eye, for I was led away by it unwarrantably now. I began to question Lucia respecting her strange disappearance from the scene on the occasion of my last visit. Breaking the ice is hazardous work, and I certainly ought not to have attempted it here. I endangered myself, if not another. Lucia rarely flushed. Shade, rather than colour, passed into her face from the effect of emotion or annoyance. A change of the kind was noticeable as I spoke, and I tried hastily to recover my former footing. But my companion would not let me quite escape the consequences of my temerity.

'You seem to have a good memory,' she remarked. 'But I am afraid it is only for trifles. These you should forget, and not even remember that you are forgetting.'

'We are apt to estimate matters differently,' I said. 'It might be little to you to keep in a seclusion you had cause to prefer; but your absence was not exactly a trifle to another.'

'I know it was not so; but what it *should* have been is my point of view. Try to look at things in a pleasant light. It makes life easier.'

'An *effort* in that line need not be recommended now,' was my response. 'There are moments when we have to set realities before us to subdue a too seductive illusion.'

'You had better turn to the mainland then, and away from this slippery surface, if this should be one of those instants;' and with the words she was skimming off from me anew.

I saw her rejoin Lerrington, but could scarcely feel jealousy, it was so evident that his society was as indifferent to her as my own. But the fact that she was unimpressionable was not reassur-

ing, taken in conjunction with her own too strong power of fascination. I would rather she had shown susceptibility to almost any emotion than have perplexed me by her unruffled loveliness.

II.

WAS I dreaming or waking? My senses, no doubt, were inwrought by the stillness of a frost-bound midnight; but surely they were too watchful and observant to be enchained likewise by the more potent spell of sleep! With eyes wide open I started upright on my couch. The room I had been allotted on my arrival at Forrest Hall was one hitherto unoccupied by me. But I could scarcely take exception to its comfort or position in the establishment, considering that it was the one chosen by the late master of the house, and which was known as 'uncle Geoffrey's room.' The bed, an old-fashioned one, faced a large mirror reaching from floor to ceiling and set into the wall. On the right-hand side of the 'four-poster' there was a door opening into a dressing-closet. This was always left unclosed at night; in the summer to give fuller ventilation to the sleeping-apartment, which was low and somewhat gloomy, and in the winter-time to admit the subdued light and warmth from a fire that was kindled in a wide grate in the dressing-room. Such had been the habit in my uncle's life, and I had made no change in the arrangements. Looking now into the mirror I saw a form reflected at full length. It was moving slowly across the floor in the inner closet and advancing towards the mantelpiece. There was a bright blaze from a wood-fire, and the glass, being opposite to the door and my bed, gave back the clear

particulars of the scene. It was a strange one; and some ghostly stories, which had been recounted for the benefit of the company by my cousin Lucia that night, came vividly to mind. The figure I was gazing at was that of my uncle Geoffrey. Clothed in a well-remembered dressing-gown of Indian pattern and gorgeous colouring, I saw his spare frame and his bent head just as I had last seen them in life. When he had gained the chimney-corner he stretched out his hand towards a huge snuff-box of tortoiseshell, which lay on the marble ledge above.

At this moment I bounded from my couch. My own wakefulness at least was proved by the action; but it led to no further discovery. I lost sight for an instant of the mirror scene; and when I sprang through the open door of communication into the dressing-room, there was no reality here to justify the spectral appearance. The cabinet had its firelight glow and its usual air of comfort, but no occupant. The second door, which gave access to the outer corridor, was closed, and not a sound or footfall disturbed the quietude of the house. I looked around me. There was no hiding-place in the small chamber. Wherever the apparition had come from, it had sought the same shrouded precincts again. I paused in a perplexity which was not exactly fear. I saw little reason for apprehension in a warm well-lit room, which showed no token of habitation, no other possessions than my own. My coat was on a chair as I had last thrown it; my dressing-case open on the table. There was nothing to remind me of a nocturnal intruder, and I could no longer conjure up even the vision of such. I returned to rest, and sleep came later, though it was some time ere I removed a fixed

gaze from the long glass opposite the couch.

I was down early the next morning, and the first person I saw in the breakfast-room was my cousin Lucia. She had on a beautifully-made dress of some warm ruby shade, with a bewitching little bow at the throat slumbering in lace.

'Good-morning,' she said gaily. 'You are more active than usual. Were your slumbers lighter or more profound? There was some change, I suppose?'

'For the better, of course, since the effect is good,' I returned. 'But I fear I indulge too much in waking dreams. They are cruelly illusive.'

'Then give them up. That cannot be difficult, if you dislike them.'

'Did I say that? Some of them are only too dear, that is my objection.'

'O, the fault is in yourself, I see; not in the visions. I thought there was a reproach somewhere, but I am glad to find it is to your own person.'

'Yes, Lucia; I am guilty of a folly, no doubt. There might be a cure for it, but I don't look for it.'

'Why not? Hopefulness is a pleasant element in life. You ought to cultivate it. It might repay exertion.'

What did she-mean? Had she understood me; and, speaking to a scarcely breathed longing, was I to know that she had fathomed it, and was pitiful?

I might have been too daring, but the fortunate entrance of Mrs. Forrester arrested me. Her head was limply adjusted as usual, but there was no dubiousness in her manner; it was decidedly friendly.

I was apt to put in a more tardy appearance in the breakfast-room, and her first questions ran

therefore in the same vein as her daughter's.

Had I slept well? The night had been so cold. She hoped my fire had been properly attended to? &c.

'Yes, there was a famous blaze,' I responded. 'It showed me a good deal more than the daylight brings out;' and then I mentioned the strange apparition in the dressing-room.

Mrs. Forrester gazed at me with a sort of terror in her blue eyes, and turned white as death. Lucia was perfectly composed, and even rallied me playfully on my weak surrender to the sway of Morpheus.

'I make a better fight,' she pursued, 'but acknowledge myself beaten in the end. You seem to give way at once, and revenge yourself on your opponent by a mere denial of the victory.'

'No, no; sleep is no enemy,' I interposed. 'I never struggle against it; and for that very reason, I suppose, it has less interest in visiting me. Last night, I know, it was very tardy in its advance. But I suppose you won't admit this?'

'Scarcely, with such clear evidence to the contrary. Dreams do not generally come before slumber.'

'Waking dreams may, and mine seem to be all of this order.'

The conversation dropped here. I did not press it, as I saw the same disturbed, even terrified, look in my hostess's face. She evidently believed in the possibility of an apparition, and especially in the credibility of what I had portrayed. The facts did not lessen my perplexity, but they made me resolve on attempting a solution of it by myself.

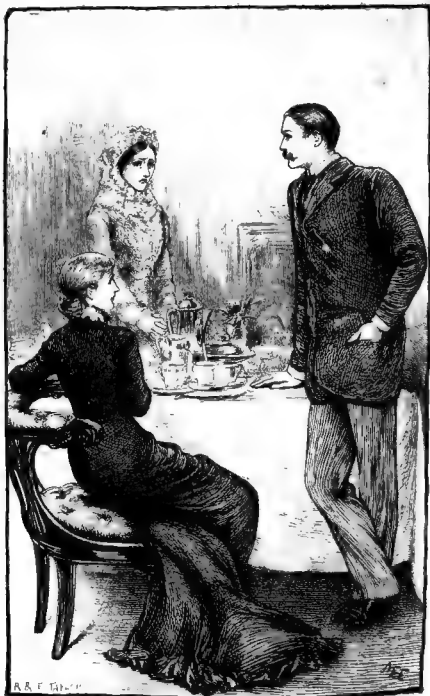
There was a change in the weather this morning. Low-lying mists wrapped the frozen waters

in a warning veil, white and mournful as a shroud. Skating was pronounced unsafe, and Lerrington, with some other gentleman of the party, started on a shooting excursion. I remained at home, having still hopes that the approach of rain was more distant than appeared, and that the fog might pass off, giving us another day's enjoyment of the ice. Lucia was too fond of the exhilarating pastime to miss it, if it could with any sense of security be managed, and I determined that if she were led into rashness it should not be alone. Doubts or expectations, however, were at once ended when at twelve o'clock a light rain began to fall, and the wind veered full to the south. If my fair cousin could have been seen or spoken to, the long hours which succeeded would not have been so overclouded. But she absented herself from drawing-room and library during the entire morning and afternoon. I first saw her at dinner-time, surrounded by the usual circle of guests, and scarcely inclined to afford me a fair share of her attention or amiability. Lerrington was on the scene, and assiduous as usual. He had come back rather cross, I thought, from his moorland trip, having had plenty of rain and little sport. He attempted to shine now, but his jests seemed damp like himself, and would not go off; and if Lucia listened to him, it was scarcely with entrancement. She was evidently bored, or preoccupied, at all events; and when the party broke up at an early hour, she retired with an abruptness which betrayed a secret relief at her escape from society.

I found my room warm and bright as ever, and sat reading for some time by the fire in the dressing-room. Then I left a lamp burning on a table opposite the door leading into the inner cham-

ber, and betook myself to rest. In assuming this attitude I was far from feeling a disposition to slumber. On the contrary, I was never more wakeful in my life; but I was resolved that the apparent routine of matters should go on as on other nights, and that no marked watchfulness on my part should affright a too nervous visitant.

Time passed, midnight approached, and I remembered with a quickening of the pulse, which rose at least to expectation, that it was just at this hour that the mirror before me had reflected such a strange scene on the preceding evening. The moment was exciting. I was not superstitious. It was suspicion rather which entered my thoughts, but this kept every sense strained and acute. The night was a gloomy one, and rain had begun to fall with such weight and persistency that the thick evergreens outside no longer formed a resisting canopy, but promoted, as it were, a second shower, which maintained a ceaseless echo of that which came direct from the skies. The sobbing sound without, the stillness of my low darkly-wainscoted chamber, each had a significance of its own which was somewhat sad and portentous. I could scarcely say what I apprehended, but my memory had gone back to circumstances of a far-away past. I had heard when a boy that my cousin Geoffrey had lost himself in our uncle's good graces through his habits of wild and reckless extravagance. Having had a final quarrel with him on this head, the nephew had gone abroad, where he managed for a time to subsist in some speculative fashion of his own. He married early an Italian lady with a fortune rather more considerable than usually falls to the lot of foreigners, and from this point in his career little more was heard of him



"Mrs. Forrester gazed at me with a sort of terror in her blue eyes, and looked white as death."

till he returned to Forrest Hall with his daughter, a lovely girl of sixteen, and paid a visit of policy to its fast-failing owner. A strange notion crossed my mind as I recalled these details. I felt that it was quite possible, indeed most probable, that my cousin had become involved in fresh embarrassments when he made the successful move which had gained him the Forrest Hall property. Could it be that he had tried to step more quickly into this by any false play with its late master? Had a fictitious death been managed, and was uncle Geoffrey still alive and a prisoner in some dark and mysterious way in his own house? The vision I had seen gave some colour to the thought, but it was dismissed again as a mere freak of the imagination. Such a scheme, and its accomplishment, I well knew could scarcely be a reality of days like the present.

Meditation evokes dreaminess, and in order to conquer it I took up a book which I had at hand. Just as I did so I became aware of some change in the light in the room. I raised my eyes to the mirror opposite to me, and saw that a shadowy form was crossing by the table, with the lamp on it, towards the chimney-piece in the closet. It was that of my uncle Geoffrey. Arrayed in the same flowered dressing-gown, with his head bent, and a stick in his hand, he went slowly along, and a faint groan was heard. The sound chilled my blood; it caused a sort of horror mingled with alarm which was all the more unnerving because it was in a measure indefinite. What could the scene mean? This life-like, yet ghostly, apparition, whence came it, and for what purpose?

Was it reality or illusion? Action was more to the purpose now than questionings, and the

next moment I, too, was in Persian garb, and stealing across the floor of my chamber towards the outer door of this apartment. I had left it ajar, and as I gained the corridor I saw that the dressing-room door, which was close beside, was partially open as well. In a second I closed it noiselessly, turned the key in the lock, and was back again in my former quarters. As I reëntered I paused, and a creeping sensation of unknown dread paralysed further movement. The mirror was full before me, and in it the same reflection, the bowed mournful figure of my uncle Geoffrey. He was at the mantelpiece now, was stooping over it with his back turned towards me, and one hand stretched out in the act of grasping his ancient snuff-box. The lid had been raised, though it could scarcely have been with the view of putting the box to its ordinary purpose of use, for the thin fingers of the old man were placing something within the receptacle, not abstracting anything therefrom. To turn away from the glass, to gain the inner door of communication with the dressing-room, I must necessarily lose the mirrored picture for a second, and fail to come directly upon the reality, having first to pass by the foot of the bed. This knowledge held me enchained a moment longer. Then the form, whether spirit or matter, began to glide off, and I felt that the crisis had come. I must follow it at all hazards. With a quick bound I was on the threshold of the cabinet; but an actual cry parted my lips at the instant. The room was empty! All remained as I had left it ere I retired to rest. The lamp was burning brightly; the wood-fire was cheerful, and ruddy in its gleam as ever. Nothing ghostly or ghastly threw a lurid colouring

on the quiet aspect of the scene. More bewildered, more awe-stricken than if I had beheld the phantom which had been such a vivid revelation, I could only stand and gaze. Then I approached the chimney-corner. The tortoise-shell box was on the high marble-ledge above; but it was shut. It seemed hard to believe that a pallid hand had but recently been laid on it, had opened it, reclosed it. Yet all this I had seen. It was no trick of the imagination. I had been wakeful, expectant. Involuntarily, half mechanically, I lifted the box, and touched the silver spring at the side. The lid flew back at the action and revealed something novel and unexpected. The interstice within was not filled with the usual contents. A small folded paper had taken their place. To withdraw it, to read it, was the work of a second. I was not dreaming before; but surely, I said to myself, there must be something of illusion now. The writing I had perused was that of my uncle Geoffrey. It was clear and unmistakable. The well-remembered characters had a forcible peculiarity of their own, which I, for one, was not likely to forget. As I gazed upon them I had present to me, in a new vision, his aged form, his withered hand. But the substance of the paper was dreamlike in the extreme, and made me pass my hand more than once across my eyes to clear off any filmy veil of drowsiness. Here, in a few words, a bequest was made to me. Half the Forrest Hall property was mine without reserve or condition; but an express wish followed on the bequest—that I should become the husband of my cousin Lucia Forrester. The document seemed to be a codicil to my uncle's will, and I noted at once that the date was

a later one than that of the testament which had been produced and proved at his death.

When sleep came to me that night I had still the paper in my hand. I knew through disturbed slumbers that I had never let it go, yet if, on awakening, I had failed to grasp it or perceive it, I could have felt little surprise. The mode of its discovery, the nature of its contents, scarcely pointed to the scenes of real life. They were more in harmony with the visions which are fleeting. But there was substance and no shadow here. The precious paper was close in my clasp, and at its touch a thrill of delightful hope ran through me. I was no longer an impoverished man, a fortune-seeking suitor. However clear I might stand in my own sight of the latter reproach, I had needed hitherto the boldness which could defy the criticisms of others. I had it now, and no farther delay should interpose between suspense and a possible happiness.

When I saw Lucia in the breakfast-room that morning she was more bewitching, more beautiful, than ever. I was naturally followed still by a sense of mystery, and felt for the first time drawn to a belief in spiritual manifestations. In no other way could I account for the extraordinary scene of the night. I said to myself that my uncle must have appeared to me to make known his will as well as his wishes; and if this were so, I was clearly called upon to carry out the latter. For reasons of my own I mentioned this second vision in the presence of my cousin Geoffrey and his wife, as well as that of the other members of the party. I gave no details, but spoke of the vividness of the apparition. Again Mrs. Forrester showed a tremour of apprehension, and a deadly pallor in her face. Geoffrey start-

ed too, and then I glanced anxiously towards Lucia. She was smiling, and maintained through all my assertions and remarks a gay incredulity. My resolves were taken forthwith. I felt her to be guiltless of any participation in a possible conspiracy to suppress the proofs of my claim to a portion of the property; and an hour or two later I had asked her to be my wife. She had been pleasant, if a little coquettish, with me all the morning, and on the other hand had treated Lerrington with a provoking nonchalance which quickened his perceptions to recall some important engagement in town. He said good-bye, and was off from the hall by an early train.

III.

‘You may make what changes in it you please, but it won’t change it for me, Lucia. I will never occupy the apartment.’

We were standing in the long corridor at Forrest Hall. *We* implies enough. She was my wife now, and thought she had a right to do anything with me. Her designs in the present instance turned fortunately towards a transformation in the house—not in its master. Yet even here I rebelled. When she proposed that uncle Geoffrey’s room and dressing-closet should no longer be shut up, but put to some practical use, I uttered the above protest. Though the vision seen in the apartment had pointed only to a path of brightness, still there was mystery associated with it which left a sense of awe on my mind that might be always overshadowing.

The Forrest Hall mansion fell to my share in the new division of the property which had been made on the production of the codicil to the will, and my cousin Geoffrey

had gone abroad then with his wife, leaving bride and bridegroom to settle down in their home-life and happiness.

‘There are rooms enough in the house,’ I added now, ‘to exercise your taste upon, Lucia. Those in the west wing are newer and brighter. Leave these in the peace which is a rightful enjoyment of the antiquated.’

‘George, you are superstitious,’ said the young bride decisively. ‘It is not right to humour you in a weakness. I could never have fancied you were so silly—a believer in dreams.’

‘Life is a dream, if you like,’ I interposed. ‘But for me there is as much reality in one episode of it which concerns the night, as in any lit up by the clearest sunshine. We may argue on this subject, but that won’t alter what is conviction more than impression.’

Lucia looked pained. She did not meet me with her usual rallery, nor turn, on the other hand, to reasoning. There was something of a distinct truthfulness in her nature which shrank from letting a misapprehension lie in the mind of another which it was in her power to dispel.

A minute later and I felt her hand stealing within my arm, and she was drawing me towards the closed door of uncle Geoffrey’s chamber. Within its precincts, while her sweet eyes anon asked pardon for a deception and again sank in bashful confusion from my glance, I learnt a full explanation of the strange experiences of the past—of all that I had seen in the mirror. The narration took my fair confessor back to the date of my first visit to Forrest Hall, after her father had become master of it. On the eve of my arrival, in making some arrangements in her room, she chanced to come across

an ornamental album, which our uncle had placed in her hands on the very day of his death. He had murmured something about a special gift to her, and that he had remembered her wishes. She thought he was wandering at the time, and, being only occupied with watchful attendance on him, she had put it away and not thought of it since. She opened the book now casually, and in doing so a paper fell from between the leaves—the very one which came finally into my possession. What followed was told with some rapidity, indeed confusion; but I pressed for no particulars, believing without a word that, however others might have acted, Lucia herself was free from reproach. It appeared that her father had made objections to the document on the score of illegality, and had represented that it was better to put it aside, and not raise up family questionings and contentions. She had held firmly to the view that I should see it in any case, and for this purpose she kept it resolutely in her own hands. Her mother especially urged upon her to give it up; and, owing to the last clause in it, declared there would be something unmaidenly on her part in bringing it forward. Lucia admitted that this plea embarrassed her in a measure. Still she would give no definite assurance as to her suppression of the paper; and she found then that her course of opposition to both parents was resented in an unexpected manner. She was kept a prisoner to her room during my stay; and it was only on one occasion, when I was supposed to be absent for the day, that she was allowed exercise in the grounds. She was on the point of returning to the house when I caught a glimpse of her there, and feeling that she could not well enter into

explanations with me in a hurried moment, she had fled in confusion.

‘And later?’ I said. ‘How was it you were able to welcome me at my next visit?’

‘I promised,’ she returned, ‘that I would not give you the paper—and I did not do so.’

‘Who did, then?’

‘No one. You found it yourself.’

‘Then I am still to believe in ghostly intervention? I may not assume you “a spirit, yet a woman too”?’

‘As you please,’ she murmured, and then, quick and light as the words fell from her, she glided off from the mirror-room in which we were standing, and disappeared within the dressing-room. I followed her, to find her gone; and while I gazed around me, in something of the old bewilderment, she was back with me again, having entered by the outer door from the corridor.

‘What is the secret?’ I said. ‘If you want the rooms to be opened up, you must throw light on them to begin with.’

‘I am afraid there is not much penetration in your nature,’ was the reply. ‘You would make neither an inventor, nor explorer. I find out things for myself. You should be as clever.’

‘I am not as inquisitive, I know.’

‘I know it, at all events,’ she broke in gaily. ‘If you had only examined the quaint old snuff-box in the first instance, instead of admiring yourself in the mirror, there would have been no need of a vision. But you were too stupid.’

‘Too vain, I thought?’

‘Both, if you like.’

‘I should prefer neither, and as the imputations are so unfounded we needn’t quarrel over them. You are quicker than I am, I

allow. Will the concession make you complaisant ?

The touch of flattery did its work, and I was enabled to gain a confirmation of my recent surmise that it was she who had personated my uncle Geoffrey. Only one point after this remained to be cleared up; and although she amused herself for some time in leaving the discovery of the matter to my own ingenuity, she grew reasonable presently. Touching some hidden spring in the oak-panelling beside the chimney-corner, a door flew back and she gained access to an inner chamber, which opened in its turn on the corridor. In this way she had made her escape from the dressing-closet whenever she found that my

watchfulness of her movements extended beyond the scene disclosed in the mirror.

‘What did uncle Geoffrey mean by saying that he had remembered your wishes, Lucia?’ I asked finally.

‘Inquisitorial still?’ she exclaimed. ‘An inquiring mind that sees for itself, but does not question, is better. However, if you are dull, I suppose I must only be indulgent. I did not like injustice, sir, that was all.’

And with this admission I had to be satisfied. There was no need, indeed, to press for more. My uncle’s will had been found, his wishes had been followed. What further could I ask ?

THAT TERRIBLE DENTIST.

A Story of the Strand.

I SUPPOSE no one would imagine that anything particularly horrible or ghastly could arise out of a mere ordinary visit to the dentist. That is altogether so commonplace and everyday an occurrence that, though you naturally regard it with painful apprehensiveness and repugnance, you do not see how anything extraordinarily horrid could possibly spring from it. Nevertheless the most terrible adventure that it has ever been my lot to pass through resulted simply from my going to have a tooth extracted.

The tale I am about to relate may seem to be somewhat prosaic in its materials, but it is at least a true narration of an incident that befell me, and one that was impressed so forcibly upon my mind as to leave a vivid remembrance behind it; vivid, indeed, even yet, though years have elapsed since it happened. My story rests upon a rather rare case in medicine, occurring at an odd moment, and when the combination of circumstances rendered it—to me at least—appalling and terrible. But you shall judge for yourselves.

It was the afternoon before Christmas-day, in the year 186—, and I had left the office and was strolling along the Strand towards Hungerford Bridge, intending to take the train from Waterloo to Richmond, where my sister and brother-in-law lived, with whom I had arranged to spend my Christmas holiday. The afternoon was still young—it being only about two o'clock, I think—and I was not

really due until shortly before seven, my sister's dinner-hour. Accordingly, I was in no particular hurry; and being reminded by the sight of a bill-of-fare temptingly displayed in the window of a restaurant that I had not as yet lunched, I turned into the place to get a snack of something.

Whether it was that the meat at this establishment was unusually tough, or whether it was simply my destiny, I do not know; but one thing is certain, that while eating I was unhappy enough to break a tooth. It was one of my back teeth, molars, an old offender that for long before had caused me trouble at times, and that had now chosen the most unpropitious possible moment to break off by the gum, and, worse than all, to plunge me straightway into all the torments of an aggravated attack of toothache.

What was to be done? Here was I, just starting forth to meet a merry assemblage of Christmas guests, old and young, bound to be jolly from the moment of my arrival and for several days to come, bound to eat, drink, and be merry among the merry, as English people consider necessary at this season. And who was to be jovial, or even cheerful, I should like to know, with a raging, racking, rasping toothache causing one endless misery all the time? There was no help for it now; the long-postponed visit to the dentist could be deferred no longer: I must go and get my aching stump extracted, and go down to Rich-

mond without it, and also without, as I fervently trusted, the pain that was now consuming me.

So, having made up my mind, I called the waiter and paid for my half-unfinished lunch, telling that commiserating official of my misfortune, and inquiring whether he knew of a good dentist in the near neighbourhood to whom he could direct me.

'Dentist, sir? Yessir!' he replied, after the manner of waiters, and as though taking an order for some comestible: 'eaps of dentists round about 'ere, sir. There's a gentleman hoppersite, but 'e's away by now; and, you see, sir, bein' as it's 'oliday time, and has most of 'em honly 'as consultin'-rooms in the Strand, and lives somewheres helse, I don't know as you'll heasily find one close by 'ere. But I'll ask the chief waiter, sir; I dessay 'e'll know of one.'

The chief waiter being appealed to did know of one, a Mr. Masseter, let us call him, who was in the habit of dining at the restaurant very frequently, and who lived close by. His address was No. — Lewis-street, one of those small streets leading off the Strand down towards the river, and he was most likely to be found at home.

'And,' added the waiter, pocketing my *douceur*, 'don't you take no notice of 'is looks, sir; 'e's a queer un to look at, is little Mr. Masseter, but a good un at 'is business, so I've 'eard, and cheap, sir; and I 'opes you'll get relief of your pain, sir; and a merry Christmas, thankee, sir.'

I turned away and sought the street I had been directed to, finding it with some trifling difficulty; but once in Lewis-street I had no trouble in discovering the house I sought, since a brass plate bearing the inscription, 'MASSETER, SURGEON-DENTIST,' sufficiently indicated it. It was an ordinary dull

brick dwelling-house, uniform with its neighbours; and in the murky December atmosphere, the whole narrow street looked about as uninteresting and uninviting for a place of residence as any that intersect that quarter.

I rang the bell, and presently the door was opened by a person, whom, from the waiter's brief description of him, I had no difficulty in recognising as the dentist himself.

'Ah,' he remarked, when I had explained the reason of my call, 'you are lucky to be just in time. I was intending to go out of town till Monday, and, not expecting any patients, I was just about to start. My housekeeper and servant are gone as it is, so, if you had been half an hour later, you would have found only an empty house. But step in and come up-stairs.'

So saying, he ushered me up to what he jocularly termed his 'torture-chamber;' remarking, as he did so, that Christmas was an unseasonable time at which to be suffering from toothache, since such an extra amount of mastication was supposed to be required then.

'But never mind,' he added, 'we'll soon be all right now, and ready for any amount of turkey and goose.'

Mr. Masseter indeed was, as the waiter at the dining-rooms had intimated to me, a most extraordinary-looking man. He was short and small, not much over five feet in height, I should think, and he was also somewhat deformed. He had a humpback, or at least much the appearance of one given him by a pair of high sloping shoulders, a projecting neck, and what is generally called a pigeon-breast. His legs were bowed, and his feet unshapely, while his arms were of unusual length, and terminated in large, bony, knuckly hands. Un-

fortunately for him, poor man, the list of deformities did not end here, but was augmented by the appearance of the head and face. The little gentleman's head was large and long; he was bald over the forehead, and his hair, clipped short and bristly, showed a surprising field of bumps and excrescences; interesting, no doubt, to a phrenologist, but unsightly enough to an ordinary beholder. Then his eyes were small and beady, a trifle crossed I fancied, but bright and twinkling like a ferret's. His beard was thick and full, but was trimmed to a point that appeared usually elevated in advance of the rest of his person, and so made more remarkable the long lank face. Hair and beard, and also a pair of beetling eyebrows, were of a peculiar rusty-red colour, that showed up in sickly contrast against a shiny sallow skin, and somehow seemed to remind me of rotten apples.

The room into which the dentist led me was what Londoners call the 'first-floor-front.' There was nothing unusual in it beyond what one commonly sees in a dentist's consulting-room. It was furnished sombrely and heavily, with leather-covered chairs, ponderous bookcases, and dark-coloured hangings and carpet. There were two windows, and a sort of table *secrétaire* stood below one of them, loaded with dental instruments and appliances. Another table occupied a corner, bearing several mahogany cases of suspicious appearance; while a movable gas-lamp of unusual shape stood on a stand near it. The mantelpiece, above a fireplace in which a small fire was apparently dying out, and various brackets and bookshelves were piled with plaster-casts and other general dental litter.

With exception of these particulars the apartment presented the

general aspect of a study or sitting-room. Stay, no! I have omitted one detail of importance. In the centre of the room, and facing one of the windows, stood THE CHAIR; that horrid combination of bolts and bars, sliding-rests and screws, that a carious generation knows only too well.

I looked at this engine with much the same feelings that a heretic in the judgment-hall of the Inquisition might be supposed to regard the sheeted rack in the dark corner. There it stood, seeming to carry an air of infernal triumph about it, and wearing a wolfish look in every joint and screw. I think some dim presentiment of what was to happen to myself mingled with those nervous apprehensions that any one may experience when they set eyes on the dentist's chair.

Flanking the chair on either side were two pillar-like stands, the one containing the usual water conveniences, and the other being, as I afterwards discovered, a receptacle for the apparatus used in generating and administering protoxide of nitrogen or 'laughing-gas,' as it is popularly called.

In these days, when a visit to a dentist is no uncommon occurrence in the lives of any of us—worse luck!—I daresay you are surprised at my retaining for so many years such a full remembrance of the little details with which I have just furnished you. But if you will have patience to bear with me to the end of my story, I think you will see no reason to wonder that my memory has been so precise.

By the way, have you ever observed the curious transformation that comes over you directly the door closes behind you, and you are once fairly within the dentist's sanctum? That you have left your toothache behind you in the street,

or in what schoolboys aptly term 'the funking-room,' is an experience that surely no one will gainsay; but there is a further manifestation of the same feeling that I would draw your attention to. At the moment when the door has closed, and you feel that you are now entirely in the power of the gentleman who is about to operate on your offending 'ivories,' you become conscious of a feeling of moral abasement taking possession of you.

However mild-mannered be the individual dentist you confront—and these gentlemen are preëminent for their suavity—you have a singular desire to treat him with most exaggerated courtesy. You would like to bow constantly, and address him as 'Sir!' You laugh feverishly and inordinately at the tamest and stupidest joke he may emit. You abase yourself before him, feeling that he is to be your executioner in some sort, and that you are helplessly and utterly in his power. I had all that feeling on the occasion I am telling of, and I think it was somewhat more absorbing than common; for I remember having some very unusual thrills of nervous agitation, though there was nothing in especial to have caused them. I suppose it was presentiment of my coming fate.

Well, after a few preliminary questions, which he scarcely permitted me to answer, Mr. Masseter, with the dexterity of his craft, adroitly piloted me into the chair. Once safely within its embrace, I became like plastic dough under his manipulation. He hovered over me, examining my mouth, in a ghoul-like manner that was in itself sufficiently discomposing; and while he kept up a perpetual undercurrent of—'Now, I'm not going to hurt you in the least! It's perfectly painless!

Won't pain you at all! Now don't be afraid; I won't hurt you, won't hurt you!' he yet prodded and tapped with relentless and cold-blooded ferocity, putting me to excruciating and indescribable agony.

I recalled to mind the waiter's eulogies on this operator, and as he kept up the monologue just mentioned and its accompanying practical disproof, I thought to myself that there could be no mistake: Mr. Masseter evidently did 'know his business.'

'Now,' said the little man, after he had finished his explorations, 'I'll tell you what, sir: that's a very awkward stump of yours! It may give me a little trouble to extract; and come out it must, if you are to be freed from pain. Now what do you say to taking the gas, eh? It's perfectly harmless; effects don't last ten minutes; and it will save all pain. Luckily the apparatus is all ready, as I was using it this morning; and I won't charge you anything extra for it. Come now, what do you say?'

This he accented with divers grins and gestures that he probably meant to be cordial and persuasive, but that only served, unfortunately, to render his singular appearance more uncouth if possible. However, I felt his proposition to be so reasonable and kind that I at once assented to it.

Immediately that I had signified my willingness to be put under the influence of the gas, Mr. Masseter opened the stand or case that I mentioned, and having arranged the apparatus within it, he drew from it a coil of tube, one end of which was in connection with the gas-receiver, and the other was furnished with a sort of mouth and nose-piece. This mouth-piece he adjusted to my face as I sat back in the chair, telling me to respire gently.

I daresay many of you have

taken the gas at one time or another, and pretty well know what the experience is like; but I may as well describe to you the effects it had upon me.

I was first of all conscious of a kind of half-choking sensation in the throat and some uneasiness in the chest, but that quickly passed off. Then I began to get gradually more and more exhilarated in mind—somewhat like dram-drinking would affect one, but of course quicker, and also more easily and buoyantly. I wanted to talk, but the infernal mouthpiece prevented me. I seemed conscious that I had lots of things to say that were really very witty; but no, I could not get utterance for them. All sorts of humorous ideas struggled vaguely in my mind; and though I felt I was growing very silly, yet I wished to let the feeling increase. Then it appeared to me to be necessary that I should get up in order to give free vent to my mirthful tendencies; but no, the dentist held me down in the chair, and kept the mouthpiece still over my face. I struggled to get free, and fought with my hands to release myself; for I felt that there was a whole tempest of laughter within me that ought to be let out. Every moment, too, the dentist himself and the whole situation seemed to become more and more ludicrous to my mind, and I strove and strove with the little man, who was fairly lying on top of me now, until I suppose I lost consciousness more or less.

I came-to all of a sudden, with a singular feeling of shame and contrition, as it were, for the foolishness I had been guilty of. But one consideration bore all others down before it. The pain in my jaw was intensified instead of being relieved.

Mr. Masseter was standing in front of me, looking rather rueful.

‘Have you got it out?’ I gasped.

‘No,’ he said smilingly. ‘The fact is you are a little rough under the gas. It excited you a good deal; and so, as you kept moving and struggling with me, I did not get a chance to operate till just as you were coming round again.’

‘Well, what’s to be done? What do you propose?’ I said querulously.

‘O,’ he replied, ‘it will be all right if you’ll only just permit me to do what is needful in cases of a similar idiosyncrasy to your own.’

‘What is that?’ I questioned.

‘Nothing that need discompose you, sir,’ he answered; ‘merely to let me fasten your limbs for the moment, so that I may get at your mouth when you are under the gas. I’ve several times had to do just the same thing to lady-patients.’

‘Fasten me up!’ I said, in amazement. ‘I never heard of such a thing before! It’s very unusual, is it not?’

‘Unusual, yes, in a general way; but every dentist who employs the gas must sometimes have recourse to it, or else operate without the gas at all; which, in your own case, would be very painful, as I have told you.’

‘How do you mean to do it, then?’ I asked him.

‘In this way,’ he answered: ‘I have here two collars or bracelets united by a short chain. Now if you will pass your hands behind the back of the chair, and permit me to fasten your wrists with this contrivance, I shall be able to get to your mouth without your fighting with me when you are under the influence of the gas. There is a bar here, too, that I can shut down over your knees to control them, and a strap to pass across your shins and keep you from kicking.’

My jaw was now aching so furiously that I was ready to close with any plan that offered speedy relief.

‘Fire away,’ I said. ‘Do what you like, only rid me of this pain.’

So, in a minute or two, I was made securely captive in the chair, in the manner as aforesaid. I am not a suspicious man, and as everything seemed natural enough, I had not the least reason for objecting to the plan. Certainly I felt a little foolish, and the thought crossed my mind that, if the unprepossessing little man who was busying himself about me meant foul play of any sort, he had me most completely in his power. But there was no excuse for harbouring such a notion; and if events had taken the course they were intended to, I should have had no occasion to grumble at my temporary bonds. That they did not do so the sequel of my tale will quickly show, but of course I could have no prevision at that moment of what actually was to follow.

So it was with perfect composure and acquiescence that I again felt the mouthpiece put over my face, and that I recommenced inhaling the gas. I underwent much the same succession of feelings on this second occasion as before, with this difference, that my bonds prevented my struggling and interfering with the dentist in the performance of his work. When I recovered from the gas, therefore, I found, to my delight, that the job was over, my offending member gone, and my pain with it. Mr. Masseter was holding a glass of water to my mouth, and I felt altogether in a state of tranquil blessedness.

So far, then, things had gone according to settled plan and intention; now they were quickly to assume a course extraordinary.

What fiend prompted him to do it, I do not know; but, just at this juncture, Mr. Masseter asked me to let him take a cast of my upper jaw. It was from the lower, you understand, that the broken stump had just been extracted. The reason of his request was that I have a peculiar arrangement, or disarrangement if you like, of the teeth, and the dentist, so he told me, was desirous to have a cast of the jaw.

As you may suppose, the request, my compliance with it, and its execution occupied such a short moment, that I never thought to ask for release from my bonds first; and, to do the poor little man justice, I am perfectly sure it never occurred to him either.

Everything being in readiness, Mr. Masseter stepped over to me, and, telling me to open my mouth to its widest extent, he placed in it a sort of little spoon or trowel filled with some composition resembling putty in consistence. This spoon was flat at the bottom, and shaped so as to fit the mouth, which it nearly filled. By raising and manipulating it a little the composition came in contact with the palate and upper teeth, and being soft, moulded itself to their shape.

Just at the precise moment when my teeth were fixed in the composition in this way, the dentist moved to the table to reach a spatula or probe or some such instrument. He said something, but I failed to catch what it was, as he moved away from me. Then, to my utter amazement, he suddenly fell to the ground, turning partially towards me as he sank, so that his head and back came up against the panelling below the window in front of me, and were supported by it.

Naturally I thought he had but tripped over the carpet or some-

thing, and I instinctively made an effort to rise and help him. Of course I could not do that, fixed as I was, and I was rather amused at the *contretemps*. I looked to see him spring up again at once, as a man would under the circumstances. For several moments I watched him, all the while seeing nothing but the ridiculous in the incident. Then my mirth gradually gave way to concern, and that became in its turn actual alarm. What could be the matter? The man did not move a muscle or even speak!

There he lay, or rather crouched, without visible motion of any kind, just as he had fallen; one leg was drawn up under him, the other extended; his back and shoulders were resting against the wall, his arms hanging loosely down, and his face fully turned in my direction. His eyes and mouth were open, the former fixed and staring, with a certain glassiness coming into them, while his complexion was beginning to assume a more ghastly and livid look. What on earth could be the matter with the man? I asked myself. Was he in a fit of some sort? Hardly, for there was none of that convulsive motion one usually associates with the idea of a fit. Then what *was* it? Could it be possible—that—the man—was—dead?

I had enough knowledge of medical science to know that these deformed subjects, born into the world with a body that had seemingly been the sport of creative nature, were often gifted with emotional capacities of a very extraordinary kind. In other words, it sometimes happened that a body, physically a structural abortion, might contain nervous centres and organisations capable of singularly delicate sensation and faculty. Again, I knew that persons, in whom was this hypersen-

sitive nervous power, were peculiarly liable or predisposed to a class of diseases not ordinarily met with among others, and which, too, might be manifested in them in a strange and inexplicable manner. All this, and more that I need not weary you with, existed in my mind in a confused and hazy sort of way.

You will wonder what I was doing all this time. Briefly, then, I was making the strongest and most frantic efforts to free myself from my unfortunate position.

This is how I was situated. I was sitting in the chair, which was like an ordinary solidly-built large armchair. The back had been let down to a considerable angle, so that I was really in a half-reclining posture. My arms were held round the back of the chair, behind and partially below me, and were fastened at the wrists in the manner already described. So tightly were the bracelets buckled round my wrists, that it was impossible to slip them off; while the coupling-chain between them had apparently been passed through a ring attached to the chair itself.

Across my knees was a bar that passed through the arms of the chair, and that was immovably fixed; while over my shins was a strap, completing the bonds that held me most securely fast.

To add to the miseries of my position, the spoon and its contents yet remained in my mouth, nor was any effort of mine able to dislodge it. Biting made no impression on the metal spoon, while every movement of tongue and teeth only forced the composition into my cheeks and gave it a firmer hold. I was simply bound and gagged in the securest possible manner. Had I been a slighter-built man, I might have contrived to wriggle my legs upwards, and so possibly I might have twisted

myself free; but, being large and heavy as I am, this was wholly impossible. Indeed, the chair seemed to hold me as though it had been fitted to my body, and I filled my bonds without an inch of room to spare.

Of course my first impulse, after the whole horror of the situation had forced itself upon me, was to struggle to release myself. I prolonged my efforts with frantic persistence until the perspiration streamed from every pore—cold as the weather was—and until I was thoroughly exhausted, but without relieving my position in the smallest degree. After every conceivable endeavour, after exercising my strength and ingenuity to the utmost, I still remained as at first, helplessly bound, hopelessly gagged.

I had been primarily excited to try and release myself by the desire of assisting that poor little man, who had been struck down before my eyes so suddenly, so strangely, and so awfully; but I soon began almost to forget him in alarm for my own case. Clearly I must remain where I was until somebody came to the rescue, nor could I shout to summon aid, or make any noise sufficient to attract attention.

I remembered that Mr. Masseter had told me he was alone in the house. His servants had gone away to make holiday with their friends, and he himself had just been going off somewhere when I arrived. Yet, surely, I thought somebody would come to the house before long; some servant would return, some tradesman or messenger at least would call presently, and I should be relieved. Surely, I argued with myself, here, in the very heart of London, I could not remain undiscovered.

Much as I pitied the unfortunate object before me, the outlines

of whose figure I could just perceive through the gathering gloom—for by this time the light had waned very much—deeply though I deplored his sudden and fearful fate, my mind was now fully occupied with my own personal concerns.

I thought of the party that was expecting me, whose members would shortly be commencing their Christmas-eve festivities, probably with much wonder at my non-appearance, and, likely enough, with plenty of jests at the expense of the laggard. When—O, *when!*—might I expect to join them? There was a disagreeable apprehension stealing into my head that was momentarily increasing into a terrifying certainty. The morrow was Christmas-day, and the day following was Sunday. Doubtless the dentist's servants had received leave of absence until Monday, or perhaps till Tuesday. These were days on which there would be no likelihood of tradesmen, patients, or other callers coming to the house, and consequently but small chance of any one discovering my situation. My prospect of liberty, therefore, depended on myself, or on my succeeding in attracting the attention of some passer-by in the street. It was a horrible conclusion to arrive at, just as I was panting with the futile efforts I had already made to release myself.

Again, and yet again, I strove and fought for liberty; struggling until my wrists were swelled and raw, until my arms were strained as if they had been drawn out upon the rack, until every muscle of my body and limbs seemed wrenched and torn. The muscles of my cheeks and throat were cramped and painful; my lips and tongue became swollen, tense, and bled with the strenuous efforts I made to eject that infernal spoonful of

plaster from my mouth. And when exhaustion and torture precluded all further attempts, I found all had been to no purpose—I had not gained an inch. Weakened and racked with pain, I lay in my bondage; and I am not ashamed to say that tears of despair and mortification welled from my eyes as, half choked and panting, I lay there in the darkness.

Now commenced a time in which my suffering was so acute that the living reality of it seems present with me still. That period of horrible anguish has left an ineffaceable brand upon my memory that will remain with me always. I may as well tell you at this point of my tale that I remained a prisoner until late on the Monday following—only some seventy short hours in all, but, O God, hours that to me seemed unending years!

I cannot describe to you separately each hour as it passed, each night or each day; that first night was, perhaps, the easiest of all. Gagged and bound to that fearful chair, I reclined a tortured prisoner. Prostrated by unusual exertion, my body and limbs were alternately numbed with cold or seized with cramps that would have caused me to scream if I had had the power to do so. By and by I was assailed with intensest thirst, and anon with hunger also; and these, added to the pain I suffered from the immovable constraint of my position, the aching sores and bruises my struggles had left me, and the horrid cramps that gripped my limbs, effectually banished all chance of sleep.

But the wretchedness of my physical condition was intensified by the mental misery I endured. Realise my position to yourselves if you can, and you may form some idea of my state of mind. As the slow hours passed on and on, bringing no relief with them,

and my torments grew worse and worse, I began to lose hope, and to harbour apprehensions that I might not be found until too late. Imagine the thinking and thinking I continued to endure all that horrible time, the growing despondency, the utter depression, the sense of isolation there, close to the Strand and Charing Cross, the very centre of London.

And, worst of all, I am a nervous man; and my situation was such as might have wrought upon the courage of the strongest nerved. For do not forget the silent watcher who all the time crouched opposite to me. I could not see him by night, yet I knew he was there; and with the first streaks of daylight came the gradual growing shape, joining itself among the shadows until the dead glassy eyes sprang suddenly out of the gloom and fixed themselves on mine. Though dull and cold, their immovable stare had a weirdly awful expression that fearfully excited my imagination. If I closed my eyes I still seemed to see the ghastly form through the lids; and the unquenchable fixity of that horrible gaze impelled me to turn my eyes to it.

Sounds of life were around me in plenty; and perhaps that may have kept me from going actually mad. It was a quiet street, with little or no traffic through it; but the nervous tension of my faculties made me alive to noises that one would scarcely notice in general. Moreover, after a bit, I began to link the sounds I heard to strange effects of imagination; they became living things to me, and part of the dismal nightmare through which I was passing.

By night I heard the constant chiming of Big Ben and other clocks, the occasional distant rattle of a cab, the solemn tramp of the policeman on his beat, the

voice or song of some returning reveller. Then the jangle of the milkman's cans would usher in the dawn, and gradually life would awake into abundant noise. Then, too, I would be aroused to consciousness of the ghastly sentinel who watched over me; and under the dead fascination of his motionless eyes I would hear the noises of the day. The voices and laughter, the noise of people moving in the street or in the neighbouring houses, seemed unnatural and weird; the jarring and incessant clang of a hundred different church-bells filled me with gloomy thoughts, and powerfully increased the nervous terrors of my fevered mind. There was no cheerful sunshine to exhilarate my senses, but that dim murky fog that London knows so well in winter. And when through it there arose the discordant iteration of street-sellers' cries, it seemed to my imagination, circumstanced as I was, that these were the howls of tormenting fiends.

You see that my mind was becoming distraught as the anguish of my body and the still constraint of my position affected it. All sorts of horrible ideas kept thronging into my brain; and as the hours crept slowly on, and still my odious captor held his basilisk gaze upon me, and fed on my mental life, was it any wonder that my reason became enthralled like that of one in *delirium tremens*?

So, what seemed interminable ages wore on, and weaker, with faculties fast becoming more and more estranged under the torture of body and misery of mind, my stay in purgatory drew to a close. It was the Monday afternoon, though I knew it not.

A wild terrifying notion seized me that the body before me had been entered by a demon, whose special mission it was to subject me to greater and yet inconceiv-

able torture. Through an endless time I watched the shapeless form, the detestable face, the horror-striking eyes—watched and waited in all the anguish of prolonged suspense for the awful climax of my doom.

At length came the supreme moment. I saw the dreadful eyes rapidly flicker and move; I saw a red flush spring to the dead man's cheeks, a movement to the lips, a stealthy twitching to the limbs and body. It seemed to me that the moment was come I had been expecting through a lifetime. Without astonishment, but with immense, unutterable, overwhelming horror, I saw the dead man spring lightly to his feet, and, with outstretched arms, move towards me. He spoke: the tones were Masseter's, the voice was the demon's. What the words were I know not; they brought to my mind the last tremendous shock of awful fear, under whose appalling terror I happily sank into unconsciousness.

Yes, it was a case of catalepsy, so they told me at the hospital weeks afterwards, when they judged me able to hear of it; for I was long ill with brain-fever as a sequel to my adventure. Mr. Masseter had been subject to fits of this kind formerly, but had supposed his liability to them to have ceased. He told the hospital physicians that he had felt no premonitory symptoms whatever, and that on awakening to consciousness he merely thought he had fallen, neither knowing he had had a fit, nor being sensible of the lapse of time. Finding me ill and in a swoon, he at once released me, and, not succeeding in his efforts to bring me round, feared he knew not what, and bore me off to the nearest hospital. There he discovered the real date of the day, and so became alive to what

had actually occurred. The physicians were much interested in his case, so prolonged a trance being rare, though the usual symptoms of catalepsy were well known to them. The affair made some noise at the time, owing to the singular coincidence of my captivity; and, in consequence of that, and of his own morbid sensibility, poor little Masseter shortly afterwards left Lewis-street. I have not seen him since, nor do I wish to do so; not that I bear him any ill-will—God forbid, poor little man!—

but simply because a sight of his face would too vividly renew my remembrance of an event that, besides having such a terrible effect upon me at the time, has left its fatal impress upon me for the rest of my life, and has burdened my memory with an ineffaceable nightmare load of horror that I suppose I must carry to my grave.

So ends my tale. If its details appear commonplace to you, at least reflect how terrible and all-absorbing the endurance and memory of them must be to me.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

CHRISTMAS has come—the cheery time!
 And Christmas never comes too soon.
 It brings the pageant pantomime,
 The merry Clown and Pantaloon.

* * * *

Behind the scenes! Ah, what a change
 From all the front-view glow and glitter!
 Strained canvas is the mountain-range,
 The god of day's a coarse gasfitter;
 With tin he rolls the thunder loud;
 The monarch's throne a prompter screens;
 The King himself, though princely proud,
 Chats affably behind the scenes.

Friend Bardolph casts away his nose;
 Malvolio lays aside his swagger;
 While Tragedy laughs out, and throws
 To blithe Burlesque her bowl and dagger.
 Fat Falstaff flings his stuffings off;
 The supers strut like embryo Keans;
 Good-humour turns to snarl and scoff;
 Folks change their moods behind the scenes.

Upon the stage and off 'tis so;
 This fabled tale *de te narratur*.
 Each man acts in the social show;
 The Truth's full revelation's later.
 We play our parts, we strut our hour;
 Small space for plaudits intervenes;
 Then, summoned by Supernal Power,
 We pass indeed behind the scenes.

A NIGHT AMONG THE NIHILISTS.

'ROBINSON, the boss wants you !'

'The dickens he does !' thought I ; for Mr. Dickson, Odessa agent of Bailey & Co., corn-merchants, was a bit of a Tartar, as I had learned to my cost. 'What's the row now ?' I demanded of my fellow-clerk ; 'has he got scent of our Nicolaieff escapade, or what is it ?'

'No idea,' said Gregory : 'the old boy seems in a good enough humour ; some business matter, probably. But don't keep him waiting.' So, summoning up an air of injured innocence, to be ready for all contingencies, I marched into the lion's den.

Mr. Dickson was standing before the fire in a Briton's time-honoured attitude, and motioned me into a chair in front of him. 'Mr. Robinson,' he said, 'I have great confidence in your discretion and common sense. The follies of youth will break out, but I think that you have a sterling foundation to your character underlying any superficial levity.'

I bowed.

'I believe,' he continued, 'that you can speak Russian pretty fluently.'

I bowed again.

'I have, then,' he proceeded, 'a mission which I wish you to undertake, and on the success of which your promotion may depend. I would not trust it to a subordinate, were it not that duty ties me to my post at present.'

'You may depend upon my doing my best, sir,' I replied.

'Right, sir, quite right ! What I wish you to do is briefly this : The line of railway has just been

opened to Solteff, some hundred miles up the country. Now I wish to get the start of the other Odessa firms in securing the produce of that district, which I have reason to believe may be had at very low prices. You will proceed by rail to Solteff, and interview a Mr. Dimidoff, who is the largest landed proprietor in the town. Make as favourable terms as you can with him. Both Mr. Dimidoff and I wish the whole thing to be done as quietly and secretly as possible, in fact that nothing should be known about the matter until the grain appears in Odessa. I desire it for the interests of the firm, and Mr. Dimidoff on account of the prejudice his peasantry entertain against exportation. You will find yourself expected at the end of your journey, and will start to-night. Money shall be ready for your expenses. Good-morning, Mr. Robinson ; I hope you won't fail to realise the good opinion I have of your abilities.'

'Gregory,' I said, as I strutted into the office, 'I'm off on a mission, a secret mission, my boy, an affair of thousands of pounds. Lend me your little portmanteau, mine's too imposing, and tell Ivan to pack it. A Russian millionaire expects me at the end of my journey. Don't breathe a word of it to any of Simpkins's people, or the whole game will be up. Keep it dark !'

I was so charmed at being, as it were, behind the scenes, that I crept about the office all day in a sort of cloak-and-bloody-dagger style, with responsibility and brooding care marked upon every

feature; and when at night I stepped out and stole down to the station, the unprejudiced observer would certainly have guessed, from my general behaviour, that I had emptied the contents of the strong-box, before starting, into that little valise of Gregory's. It was imprudent of him, by the way, to leave English labels pasted all over it. However, I could only hope that the 'Londons' and 'Birminghams' would attract no attention, or, at least, that no rival corn-merchant might deduce from them who I was and what my errand might be.

Having paid the necessary roubles and got my ticket, I ensconced myself in the corner of a snug Russian car, and pondered over my extraordinary good fortune. Dickson was growing old now, and if I could make my mark in this matter it might be a great thing for me. Dreams arose of a partnership in the firm. The noisy wheels seemed to clank out 'Bailey, Robinson, & Co.,' 'Bailey, Robinson, & Co.,' in a monotonous refrain, which gradually sank into a hum, and finally ceased as I dropped into a deep sleep. Had I known the experience which awaited me at the end of my journey it would hardly have been so peaceable.

I awoke with an uneasy feeling that some one was watching me closely, nor was I mistaken. A tall dark man had taken up his position on the seat opposite, and his black sinister eyes seemed to look through me and beyond me, as if he wished to read my very soul. Then I saw him glance down at my little trunk.

'Good Heavens!' thought I, 'here's Simpkins's agent, I suppose. It was careless of Gregory to leave those confounded labels on the valise.'

I closed my eyes for a time, but on reopening them I again caught the stranger's earnest gaze.

'From England, I see,' he said in Russian, showing a row of white teeth in what was meant to be an amiable smile.

'Yes,' I replied, trying to look unconcerned, but painfully aware of my failure.

'Travelling for pleasure, perhaps?' said he.

'Yes,' I answered eagerly. 'Certainly, for pleasure; nothing else.'

'Of course not,' said he, with a shade of irony in his voice. 'Englishmen always travel for pleasure, don't they? O no, nothing else.'

His conduct was mysterious, to say the least of it. It was only explainable upon two hypotheses—he was either a madman, or he was the agent of some firm bound upon the same errand as myself, and determined to show me that he guessed my little game. They were about equally unpleasant, and, on the whole, I was relieved when the train pulled up in the tumble-down shed which does duty for a station in the rising town of Solteff—Solteff, whose resources I was about to open out, and whose commerce I was to direct into the great world channels. I almost expected to see a triumphal arch as I stepped on to the platform.

I was to be expected at the end of my journey, so Mr. Dickson had informed me. I looked about among the motley crowd, but saw no Mr. Dimidoff. Suddenly a slovenly unshaved man passed me rapidly, and glanced first at me and then at my trunk—that wretched trunk, the cause of all my woes. He disappeared in the crowd; but in a little time came strolling past me again, and contrived to whisper as he did so, 'Follow me, but at some distance'

immediately setting off out of the station and down the street at a rapid pace. Here was mystery with a vengeance! I trotted along in his rear with my valise, and on turning the corner found a rough droschky waiting for me. My unshaven friend opened the door, and I stepped in.

'Is Mr. Dim—' I was beginning.

'Hush!' he cried. 'No names, no names; the very walls have ears. You will hear all to-night; and with that assurance he closed the door, and, seizing the reins, we drove off at a rapid pace; so rapid, that I saw my black-eyed acquaintance of the railway-carriage gazing after us in surprise until we were out of sight.

I thought over the whole matter as we jogged along in that abominable springless conveyance.

'They say the nobles are tyrants in Russia,' I mused; 'but it seems to me to be the other way about, for here's this poor Mr. Dimidoff, who evidently thinks his excesses will rise and murder him if he raises the price of grain in the district by exporting some out of it. Fancy being obliged to have recourse to all this mystery and deception in order to sell one's own property! Why, it's worse than an Irish landlord. It is monstrous! Well, he doesn't seem to live in a very aristocratic quarter either,' I soliloquised, as I gazed out at the narrow crooked streets and the unkempt dirty Muscovites whom we passed. 'I wish Gregory or some one was with me, for it's a cut-throat-looking shop! By Jove, he's pulling up; we must be there!'

We were there, to all appearance; for the droschky stopped, and my driver's shaggy head appeared through the aperture.

'It is here, most honoured master,' he said, as he helped me to alight.

'Is Mr. Dimi—' I commenced; but he interrupted me again.

'Anything but names,' he whispered; 'anything but that. You are too used to a land that is free. Caution, O sacred one!' and he ushered me down a stone-flagged passage, and up a stair at the end of it. 'Sit for a few minutes in this room,' he said, opening a door, 'and a repast will be served for you;' and with that he left me to my own reflections.

'Well,' thought I, 'whatever Mr. Dimidoff's house may be like, his servants are undoubtedly well trained. "O sacred one!" and "revered master!" I wonder what he'd call old Dickson himself, if he is so polite to the clerk! I suppose it wouldn't be the thing to smoke in this little crib; but I could do a pipe nicely. By the way, how confoundedly like a cell it looks!'

It certainly did look like a cell. The door was an iron one, and enormously strong, while the single window was closely barred. The floor was of wood, and sounded hollow and insecure as I strode across it. Both floor and walls were thickly splashed with coffee or some other dark liquid. On the whole it was far from being a place where one would be likely to become unreasonably festive.

I had hardly concluded my survey when I heard steps approaching down the corridor, and the door was opened by my old friend of the droschky. He announced that my dinner was ready, and, with many bows and apologies for leaving me in what he called the 'dismissal room,' he led me down the passage, and into a large and beautifully furnished apartment. A table was spread for two in the centre of it, and by the fire was standing a man very little older than myself. He turned as I came in, and stepped

forward to meet me with every symptom of profound respect.

'So young and yet so honoured!' he exclaimed; and then seeming to recollect himself, he continued: 'Pray sit at the head of the table. You must be fatigued by your long and arduous journey. We dine *tête-à-tête*; but the others assemble afterwards.'

'Mr. Dimidoff, I presume?' said I.

'No, sir,' said he, turning his keen gray eyes upon me. 'My name is Petrokine; you mistake me perhaps for one of the others. But now, not a word of business until the council meets. Try your *chef's* soup; you will find it excellent, I think.'

Who Mr. Petrokine or the others might be I could not conceive. Land stewards of Dimidoff's, perhaps; though the name did not seem familiar to my companion. However, as he appeared to shun any business questions at present, I gave in to his humour, and we conversed on social life in England—a subject in which he displayed considerable knowledge and acuteness. His remarks, too, on Malthus and the laws of population were wonderfully good, though savouring somewhat of Radicalism.

'By the way,' he remarked, as we smoked a cigar over our wine, 'we should never have known you but for the English labels on your luggage; it was the luckiest thing in the world that Alexander noticed them. We had had no personal description of you; indeed we were prepared to expect a somewhat older man. You are young indeed, sir, to be intrusted with such a mission.'

'My employer trusts me,' I replied; 'and we have learned in our trade that youth and shrewdness are not incompatible.'

'Your remark is true, sir,' returned my newly-made friend; 'but I am surprised to hear you call our glorious association a trade! Such a term is gross indeed to apply to a body of men banded together to supply the world with that which it is yearning for, but which, without our exertions, it can never hope to attain. A spiritual brotherhood would be a more fitting term.'

'By Jove!' thought I, 'how pleased the boss would be to hear him! He must have been in the business himself, whoever he is.'

'Now, sir,' said Mr. Petrokine, 'the clock points to eight, and the council must be already sitting. Let us go up together, and I will introduce you. I need hardly say that the greatest secrecy is observed, and that your appearance is anxiously awaited.'

I turned over in my mind as I followed him how I might best fulfil my mission and secure the most advantageous terms. They seemed as anxious as I was in the matter, and there appeared to be no opposition, so perhaps the best thing would be to wait and see what they would propose.

I had hardly come to this conclusion when my guide swung open a large door at the end of a passage, and I found myself in a room larger and even more gorgeously fitted up than the one in which I had dined. A long table, covered with green baize and strewn with papers, ran down the middle, and round it were sitting fourteen or fifteen men conversing earnestly. The whole scene reminded me forcibly of a gambling hell I had visited some time before.

Upon our entrance the company rose and bowed. I could not but remark that my companion attracted no attention, while every eye

was turned upon me with a strange mixture of surprise and almost servile respect. A man at the head of the table, who was remarkable for the extreme pallor of his face as contrasted with his blue-black hair and moustache, waved his hand to a seat beside him, and I sat down.

'I need hardly say,' said Mr. Petrokine, 'that Gustave Berger, the English agent, is now honouring us with his presence. He is young, indeed, Alexis,' he continued to my pale-faced neighbour, 'and yet he is of European reputation.'

'Come, draw it mild!' thought I, adding aloud, 'If you refer to me, sir, though I am indeed acting as English agent, my name is not Berger, but Robinson—Mr. Tom Robinson, at your service.'

A laugh ran round the table.

'So be it, so be it,' said the man they called Alexis. 'I commend your discretion, most honoured sir. One cannot be too careful. Preserve your English *sobriquet* by all means. I regret that any painful duty should be performed upon this auspicious evening; but the rules of our association must be preserved at any cost to our feelings, and a dismissal is inevitable to-night.'

'What the deuce is the fellow driving at?' thought I. 'What is it to me if he does give his servant the sack? This Dimidoff, wherever he is, seems to keep a private lunatic asylum.'

'Take out the gag!' The words fairly shot through me, and I started in my chair. It was Petrokine who spoke. For the first time I noticed that a burly stout man, sitting at the other end of the table, had his arms tied behind his chair and a handkerchief round his mouth. A horrible suspicion began to creep into my heart. Where was I? Was I in

Mr. Dimidoff's? Who were these men with their strange words?

'Take out the gag!' repeated Petrokine; and the handkerchief was removed.

'Now, Paul Ivanovitch,' said he, 'what have you to say before you go?'

'Not a dismissal, sirs,' he pleaded, 'not a dismissal; anything but that! I will go into some distant land, and my mouth shall be closed for ever. I will do anything that the society asks; but pray, pray do not dismiss me.'

'You know our laws, and you know your crime,' said Alexis, in a cold harsh voice. 'Who drove us from Odessa by his false tongue and his double face? Who wrote the anonymous letter to the Governor? Who cut the wire that would have destroyed the arch-tyrant? You did, Paul Ivanovitch; and you must die.'

I leaned back in my chair and fairly gasped.

'Remove him!' said Petrokine; and the man of the droschky with two others forced him out.

I heard the footsteps pass down the passage, and then a door open and shut. Then came a sound as of a struggle, ended by a heavy crunching blow and a dull thud.

'So perish all who are false to their oath,' said Alexis solemnly; and a hoarse 'Amen' went up from his companions.

'Death alone can dismiss us from our order,' said another man further down; 'but Mr. Berg—Mr. Robinson is pale. The scene has been too much for him after his long journey from England.'

'O Tom, Tom,' thought I, 'if ever you get out of this scrape you'll turn over a new leaf. You're not fit to die, and that's a fact.' It was only too evident to me now that by some strange misconception I had got in among a gang of cold-blooded Nihilists, who

mistook me for one of their order. I felt, after what I had witnessed, that my only chance of life was to try to play the rôle thus forced upon me until an opportunity for escape should present itself; so I tried hard to regain my air of self-possession, which had been so rudely shaken.

'I am indeed fatigued,' I replied, 'but I feel stronger now. Excuse my momentary weakness.'

'It was but natural,' said a man with a thick beard at my right hand. 'And now, most honoured sir, how goes the cause in England?'

'Remarkably well,' I answered.

'Has the great commissioner condescended to send a missive to the Solteff branch?' asked Petrokine.

'Nothing in writing,' I replied.

'But he has spoken of it?'

'Yes: he said he had watched it with feelings of the liveliest satisfaction,' I returned.

'Tis well! 'tis well!' ran round the table.

I felt giddy and sick from the critical nature of my position. Any moment a question might be asked which would show me in my true colours. I rose and helped myself from a decanter of brandy which stood on a side table. The potent liquor flew to my excited brain, and as I sat down I felt reckless enough to be half amused at my position, and inclined to play with my tormentors. I still, however, had all my wits about me.

'You have been to Birmingham?' asked the man with the beard.

'Many times,' said I.

'Then you have of course seen the private workshop and arsenal?'

'I have been over them both more than once.'

'It is still, I suppose, entirely unsuspected by the police?' continued my interrogator.

'Entirely,' I replied.

'Can you tell us how it is that so large a concern is kept so completely secret?'

Here was a poser, but my native impudence and the brandy seemed to come to my aid.

'That is information,' I replied, 'which I do not feel justified in divulging even here. In withholding it I am acting under the direction of the chief commissioner.'

'You are right—perfectly right,' said my original friend Petrokine. 'You will no doubt make your report to the central office at Moscow before entering into such details.'

'Exactly so,' I replied, only too happy to get a lift out of my difficulty.

'We have heard,' said Alexis, 'that you were sent to inspect the Livadia. Can you give us any particulars about it?'

'Anything you ask I will endeavour to answer,' I replied, in desperation.

'Have any orders been made in Birmingham concerning it?'

'None when I left England.'

'Well, well, there's plenty of time yet,' said the man with the beard—'many months. Will the bottom be of wood or iron?'

'Of wood,' I answered at random.

'Tis well!' said another voice. 'And what is the breadth of the Clyde below Greenock?'

'It varies much,' I replied; 'on an average about eighty yards.'

'How many men does she carry?' asked an anæmic-looking youth at the foot of the table, who seemed more fit for a public school than this den of murder.

'About three hundred,' said I.

'A floating coffin!' said the young Nihilist, in a sepulchral voice.

'Are the store-rooms on a level

with or underneath the state cabins? asked Petrokine.

'Underneath,' said I decisively, though I need hardly say I had not the smallest conception.

'And now, most honoured sir,' said Alexis, 'tell us what was the reply of Bauer the German Socialist to Ravinsky's proclamation.'

Here was a deadlock with a vengeance. Whether my cunning would have extricated me from it or not was never decided, for Providence hurried me from one dilemma into another and a worse one.

A door slammed down-stairs, and rapid footsteps were heard approaching. Then came a loud tap outside, followed by two smaller ones.

'The sign of the society!' said Petrokine; 'and yet we are all present; who can it be?'

The door was thrown open, and a man entered, dusty and travel-stained, but with an air of authority and power stamped on every feature of his harsh but expressive face. He glanced round the table, scanning each countenance carefully. There was a start of surprise in the room. He was evidently a stranger to them all.

'What means this intrusion, sir?' said my friend with the beard.

'Intrusion?' said the stranger. 'I was given to understand that I was expected, and had looked forward to a warmer welcome from my fellow-associates. I am personally unknown to you, gentlemen, but I am proud to think that my name should command some respect among you. I am Gustave Berger, the agent from England, bearing letters from the chief commissioner to his well-beloved brothers of Solteff.'

One of their own bombs could hardly have created greater surprise had it been fired in the midst of them. Every eye was

fixed alternately on me and upon the newly-arrived agent.

'If you are indeed Gustave Berger,' said Petrokine, 'who is this?'

'That I am Gustave Berger these credentials will show,' said the stranger, as he threw a packet upon the table. 'Who that man may be I know not; but if he has intruded himself upon the lodge under false pretences, it is clear that he must never carry out of the room what he has learned. Speak, sir,' he added, addressing me: 'who and what are you?'

I felt that my time had come. My revolver was in my hip-pocket; but what was that against so many desperate men? I grasped the butt of it, however, as a drowning man clings to a straw, and I tried to preserve my coolness as I glanced round at the cold vindictive faces turned towards me.

'Gentlemen,' I said, 'the rôle I have played to-night has been a purely involuntary one on my part. I am no police spy, as you seem to suspect, nor, on the other hand, have I the honour to be a member of your association. I am an inoffensive corn-dealer, who, by an extraordinary mistake, has been forced into this unpleasant and awkward position.'

I paused for a moment. Was it my fancy that there was a peculiar noise in the street—a noise as of many feet treading softly? No, it had died away; it was but the throbbing of my own heart.

'I need hardly say,' I continued, 'that anything I may have heard to-night will be safe in my keeping. I pledge my solemn honour as a gentleman that not one word of it shall transpire through me.'

The senses of men in great physical danger become strangely acute, or their imagination plays

them curious tricks. My back was towards the door as I sat, but I could have sworn that I heard heavy breathing behind it. Was it the three minions whom I had seen before in the performance of their hateful functions, and who, like vultures, had sniffed another victim?

I looked round the table. Still the same hard cruel faces. Not one glance of sympathy. I cocked the revolver in my pocket.

There was a painful silence, which was broken by the harsh grating voice of Petrokine.

'Promises are easily made and easily broken,' he said. 'There is but one way of securing eternal silence. It is our lives or yours. Let the highest among us speak.'

'You are right, sir,' said the English agent; 'there is but one course open. He must be dismissed.'

I knew what that meant in their confounded jargon, and sprang to my feet.

'By Heaven,' I shouted, putting my back against the door, 'you sha'n't butcher a free Englishman like a sheep! The first among you who stirs, drops!'

A man sprang at me. I saw along the sights of my Derringer the gleam of a knife and the demoniacal face of Gustave Berger. Then I pulled the trigger, and, with his hoarse scream sounding in my ears, I was felled to the ground by a crashing blow from behind. Half unconscious and pressed down by some heavy weight, I heard the noise of shouts and blows above me, and then I fainted away.

When I came to myself I was lying among the *débris* of the door, which had been beaten in on the top of me. Opposite were a dozen of the men who had lately sat in judgment upon me, tied two and two, and guarded by a

score of Russian soldiers. Beside me was the corpse of the ill-fated English agent, the whole face blown in by the force of the explosion. Alexis and Petrokine were both lying on the floor like myself, bleeding profusely.

'Well, young fellow, you've had a narrow escape,' said a hearty voice in my ear.

I looked up, and recognised my black-eyed acquaintance of the railway-carriage.

'Stand up,' he continued: 'you're only a bit stunned; no bones broken. It's no wonder I mistook you for the Nihilist agent, when the very lodge itself was taken in. Well, you're the only stranger who ever came out of this den alive. Come down-stairs with me. I know who you are, and what you are after now; I'll take you to Mr. Dimidoff. Nay, don't go in there,' he cried, as I walked towards the door of the cell into which I had been originally ushered. 'Keep out of that; you've seen evil sights enough for one day. Come down and have a glass of liquor.'

He explained as we walked back to the hotel that the police of Solteff, of which he was the chief, had had warning and been on the look-out during some time for this Nihilistic emissary. My arrival in so unfrequented a place, coupled with my air of secrecy and the English labels on that confounded portmanteau of Gregory's, had completed the business.

I have little more to tell. My Socialistic acquaintances were all either transported to Siberia or executed. My mission was performed to the satisfaction of my employers. My conduct during the whole business has won me promotion, and my prospects for life have been improved since that horrible night the remembrance of which still makes me shiver.

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ONLY TEN MINUTES;

Or What my Dream told me.

I.

THE Kenricks were always a large family. When I was a lad, I drew up a genealogical table, whence it appeared that I, Arthur George Ford Kenrick, was at that period the possessor of eleven uncles and aunts on my father's side, of twenty-eight first cousins in the persons of their children, and of eight brothers and sisters of my own. I was the eldest son of a second brother. My eldest uncle—my uncle George, to wit, who was also my godfather, as my second name testifies—was the great man of our tribe, and the head of the firm of Kenrick & Company, merchants, of Shanghai. My father had also made a very respectable fortune as a colonial broker: my other uncles were all prosperous fathers of families, and my aunts were all flourishing mothers. As my branch of the family tree developed from the budding stage of the nursery and schoolroom, my sisters bade fair to follow the good example of their aunts, and my brothers to take after their uncles. I must ask my reader to get it well into his head that I am distinctly a member of a *very* large and exceedingly marrying family on my father's side. That seemingly immaterial acci-

dent is the very root of my whole story.

The only exception to the law of likeness which governed the Kenricks in general was, at least until my own birth, my uncle George. He alone had never married: indeed, he both professed and practised such misogynic principles as to have earned for himself the name of 'the old bachelor' at nineteen years old. He had never stumbled over so much as the merest threshold of flirtation. He was friendly with his sisters-in-law and fond of his nieces; but a strange petticoat was a terror to him. A more easy-going genial man among men was not to be found in the world than George Kenrick; but the appearance of a woman acted on him like a sudden frost in summer. Nor did he by any means conceal his objection to the sex at large, but was a public and open railer at women and their ways. So that, in spite of his good looks, good heart, good temper, and good fortune, his enemies gave him up as a hopeless case and left him alone.

It is easy to imagine how such a brother and uncle was prized and honoured—for I can assure all whom it concerns that it is not only the needy who make much of

a rich relation who has notoriously forsworn matrimony. But it so happened that uncle George took it into his head that he would like to have a son and heir, so long as he could manage it without the help of anything in the shape of womankind. Naturally, as soon as I came into the world, uncle George was asked to be my godfather; and I had the advantage, it will be remembered, of being the firstborn of the brother who came next to him. And, curiously enough, it so happened that, as I grew up, I became even less like a typical Kenrick than he. I was idle at my books; I was a dunce at arithmetic; I was mortally afraid of little girls. But I had a consuming passion for paints and pencils, and one lucky or unlucky day I made a shameless caricature of uncle George himself, which happened to fall into his own hands.

I can see him now, turning it upside down, and downside up, and round and round; and I can see his frown trying to keep itself from turning into a smile. It was really a very good bit of art in its way, I believe.

‘If a herring and a half cost threehalfpence, how many can you buy for twopence?’ asked he.

I am sometimes uncertain of the correct answer to this day; but I said then, at a venture, ‘One and a quarter.’

‘You’ll do, my lad!’ said uncle George cordially. ‘I’d give my eyes to be a painter instead of a China merchant; but I never could draw a straight line, and I never could manage to get less than value for my money. Never mind—we’ll have an artist in the family yet, and I’ll be he—by deputy. And if ever you get as far as “rule of three,” I’ll—’

What he would do, I know not. But he had a long talk with my

father that same day. And it became an understood thing in the family (which could well afford the disappointment) that I was to study art at uncle George’s expense, and was to be his sole heir: in effect, that I was to be given over to him. So said, so done. It is not his fault that I am not a better painter than I am. Or rather it is his fault; for I should surely have studied harder had I not known myself to be sole heir, under his will, to all the results of the business at Shanghai. My father also altered his will; and, as I was more than amply provided for, divided among my eight brothers and sisters what would have been my share of his fortune. It was just, for I should eventually be richer than all my brothers and sisters put together; but I fancy that my father may have thought it politic to insure my uncle’s mind against changing by making him feel that my career was altogether dependent upon him.

My history thenceforth, up to the age of about eight-and-twenty, is soon told. I was taken from school and put to painting, which I followed with much more pleasure than industry, and without exceeding my very handsome allowance by more than was natural in one who never could understand the price of herrings. My uncle returned to Shanghai; and very soon afterwards my father died, leaving behind him the will I have described.

It was in the autumn of a never-to-be-forgotten year that I started, alone, on a sketching-tour in North Wales, and arrived, on foot, at the little inn of Llanpwll. That little inn is an hotel now, and Llanpwll has been caught and tamed; but it was a pleasant place then, and full of wild charm. I used to like rambling about by myself in those

days, though less, I am afraid, for the sake of art than for that of the little adventures one picks up by the way; and very little adventures will serve the turn of one who is by nature a bit of a vagabond. At home in London I liked comfort and pleasure as well as any man, and was much too well off to be a free citizen of artistic Bohemia. So it was all the more pleasant to become, at times, a sharer with my fellows in all those luxuries of freedom, hunger, solitude, and fatigue which money cannot buy, and which, in great cities, are the privilege of none but the poor. I never rode, I frequented the humblest inns, I carried no baggage, and I outdid my brother painters in the roughness and shabbiness of my clothes, for painters were not then the well-trimmed race that they have since become.

I was just as well off in mind, body, and estate as a young man can be. I could work as much as I liked, and I could idle as much as I liked, and both in the way that best pleased me. I had perfect health, no restraints, and no cares either for the day or for the morrow: I had only to hold out my hand to life, and to draw it back well filled. I was not even in love; for though I did not altogether take after my uncle George in the matter of flirtations, and though my original fear of little girls had not been carried on into my intercourse with great ones, still my heart was just as free as my godfather's own. I looked forward to passing just as many or just as few pleasant days at Llanpwll as might please my humour, and then tramping on to find yet pleasanter days elsewhere. Fortune was my hostess everywhere, and always a kind one.

The next day I rambled about in search of a subject all day long, dined luxuriously on trout, and

then slept a single sleep for ten hours without a single dream. For I must tell you that I never dream by night, whatever I may do by day. My habit is to go off when my head touches the pillow, and to wake up all over at once, as soon as sleep has done its duty. I doubt if, in those days at least, I really knew what dreaming meant. And I never felt so refreshed and so vigorous as I did at breakfast-time on that special next morning.

I had found a subject that satisfied me with its promise, and I was eager to begin. I need not describe it; there were water, wood, and mountain, and all the other stock in art of rambling painters in North Wales. I would really paint a picture this time.

But for once I had reckoned without my hostess—Fortune. On the very spot I had chosen for myself yesterday there sat an earlier bird intent upon my worm; a rival wooer of Nature, painting as if she had not an instant of her life to lose. *Her* life—for my rival was a she.

Owing to the nature of the path I had come upon her almost before I saw her; and she was far too absorbed to have heard my coming. I hardly knew what to do. I never felt more eager for work; I had lived a life of mood-humouring, and I felt as if I must needs paint that picture or none, and to-day or never. And yet there was no possible way of saying to her, 'Pardon me; but this bit of Nature is retained.' Meanwhile I took a good long look at her; for one does not—or rather in those days did not—meet a wandering sketcher in petticoats every day at out-of-the-way places like Llanpwll. And less often still used one to meet sketchers in petticoats like her; and not more often now than then. Uncle George, no doubt, would have run away. I kept my ground.

She was beyond all question a remarkably pretty girl—really pretty, and not merely from a painter's point of view. She was very pretty, and very little, and very young. She was a lady, every inch of her—not that this necessarily amounts to much, seeing how few her inches were; and she was tastefully as well as sensibly dressed in—I am a bad hand at describing clothes—some very plain dark stuff made in a very plain and homely fashion, with some sort of hat as unpretending as the rest of her costume. And now, having got rid of the clothes, for her who wore them. Plain and homely as these were, they did not altogether hide a most exquisite and most perfect figure, charmingly slender and lithe, but in no respect less full than is formed by health and Nature. She was the sort of girl who would fly up a mountain, and be fresher at the top than she was before she began to climb. Her face, even at first sight, was indescribably winning. When I call her pretty I hardly know, after all, whether the word be the right one; or, if it be, whether it was not her expression, and not her features, that make it so. I suppose the truth is that her features were pretty, and their expression a great deal more. She was brightly and healthily fair, not wholly unburned by the sun and wind, which is by no means always so unbecoming as women believe. Her eyes were gray, her nose neither long nor short, and her mouth neither large nor small. That is not much of a description for a painter. But it must pass. For it was a good face, at once pure and wise, and lighted up with kind and gentle humour. I am not sure, after all, that she was so much absorbed in her work as not to have thoughts apart from, though they must needs be in harmony with, the picture she was

trying to make her own. Though she had not heard my coming steps, I could see that the bright September air and the deep inaudible song that only belongs to mountain silence had as much to do with the light in her face as what was seen by her eyes. There was something unspeakably true, and simple, and natural, and wise in the best and sweetest way, as surely about her as there was in the light and the air. She seemed to make the day itself feel the better for her being there.

But, nevertheless, she had picked up my own particular worm. So I did the only thing that seemed to be left me. Here was an adventure, anyhow. There was a convenient bit of rock in which I could sit very comfortably and unseen—unless she happened to look up, which did not seem at all likely. I climbed to the top without making any noise, put a block on my knees, and began to sketch—*Her*.

So she sketched the scene, and I, till I could get my innings, sketched the sketcher. As the minutes went by I began to think that I had by no means the worse of the bargain. There is plenty of Nature in North Wales, but there are not many girls like this in Nature. Presently I began to hope that she would not leave her work too soon; at least, not until I had done enough to make a picture of at leisure. She worked hard and fast, and I harder and faster; and twenty times at least I caught some new light or shade of expression that obliged me to begin in spirit all over again. Never had I found a subject that had interested me, nay, fascinated me more—never since I had caricatured uncle George.

At last she laid down her work and rose. And, to my dismay, she *did* look up, and she saw me as plainly as I saw her. I laid

my block face downwards, as guiltily as if I had been caught red-handed in the middle of a crime.

'Sir,' she said, very quietly and calmly, but in a voice—a very sweet one, by the way—that seemed somehow to hide a smile, 'would you mind being so kind as to hand me down a small basket that you will find behind that bit of rock on your left hand? Thank you; I am very much obliged.'

As all the world knows, there are exactly eleven thousand three hundred and forty-five ways in which a girl can speak to a strange young man whom she meets alone by chance, and for the first time. The way in which this girl spoke to me was in the very best of them. It was most clearly not meant either to attract or to encourage or to serve for ice-breaking, or, on the other hand, to impress or repel; she wanted something, and she was not afraid to ask for it simply, and that was all. It implied at once the courage that comes from trust, and the trust that comes from courage. I suppose she had never had cause to fear or mistrust any fellow human soul.

She opened the basket I had handed her, took out some sandwiches and a bottle of milk, and began to eat as unconcerned as if no male creature were by to see. But if she felt no cause for fear, why—not being uncle George—should I?

'We seem both to have been caught by the same bit,' said I. 'This is what I was hunting for all yesterday. But I suppose you know this country well?'

'Pretty well,' said she. 'But—may I not offer you some of my dinner, as you don't seem to have brought any of your own?'

'I don't know how to say No; but I must say it, if I may. I

should like to see your morning's work, though—if—'

'Certainly,' said she, handing me up a sketch which, combined with her entire freedom from all shyness about the matter, settled at once for me the question of whether she was artist or amateur. Beyond question she was fully as much an artist as I, and probably a great deal more. 'I'm afraid it is a sad libel, though. Will you, please, let me see yours?'

'Of course—' I was beginning, when I suddenly remembered what my morning's work had been. I suspected myself of colouring, and the suspicion fulfilled itself, I am sure, in the usual way. 'O, mine—I'm afraid,' I said, leaping at whatever lie was nearest to hand, 'I'm afraid I must plead guilty to hideous laziness in the face of your industry. I've been all this while going to begin. I wanted the afternoon light, you see—'

'How lucky! it is afternoon now. I wish you would let me watch you work, if I may? It will be a grand chance for me.'

'But you are yourself a painter, are not you? And a fine one. I can't pretend. But our common choice of a subject should be a sort of introduction between us, any way. I've no doubt I am arguing myself unknown not to know you, and shall feel ashamed of my ignorance when I find out who you are.' For I was certain by this time that I had fallen in with somebody who was somebody in the world of art, and whose name and works at least I ought to know.

'I don't think it likely that you ever heard of me,' said she, a little stiffly. 'I suppose you come from London. I don't. You are not likely to have heard of—of—of—Mildred Ashton. And as to being a painter, I only know I am a very poor one indeed.'

'Then all I can say is, you will

not remain unknown or poor for long. You have genius, Miss Ashton; that is a big word, but a true one.'

Her whole face lighted up with pleasure.

'Do you really mean what you say?' asked she.

'I hope I always mean what I say,' said I, stupidly enough. It did not even strike me as strange that such chance companions as we were should be beginning to talk as if we were friends. I only noticed her childlike pleasure at my speech, and that it was far too simple and natural to be called vain.

'And you are a real painter?' she asked.

'It is my calling. Isn't it yours?'

'I have no other. But I want teaching very badly indeed. I have told you my name. What is yours?'

'Arthur Kenrick.'

'No doubt I ought to know it, only I don't,' said she, nearly echoing my own words. 'The only Kenrick I ever heard of is a friend of a cousin of mine, who lives in China, at a place called Shanghai—'

'What! you know my uncle, Miss Ashton? That is strange indeed! I am the nephew of Mr. George Kenrick of Shanghai.'

'No, I don't know him,' said Miss Ashton. 'But why is it strange that your uncle should know my cousin, when they both live in the same town? However, I am glad that I know it is so, and therefore a little about who you are. Are you not going to begin?'

It is only a great deal too easy to write down empty words. But until some man of science finds out how to reproduce their tone and colour, the pen must be content to be to the tongue what a mere photograph is to a picture. I am obliged to be vain enough to suppose that Miss Ashton took me

for some sort of a gentleman, which means a man to whom any woman may speak freely under any circumstances and at any time. But she must have been exceptionally a lady to accept her freedom as so much a matter of course, and without the least shadow of a thought that her making a stranger's acquaintance in this fashion might be thought a little strange by others. I only wish I had the least power of saying exactly what I mean. I can only wish that we all lived in a world where introductions and credentials could be ignored as foolish forms. As it is, those who ignore them must either be worse and more foolish than their neighbours, or else as wise as the serpent and as harmless as the dove. And nobody who had eyes and ears could doubt for a moment as to which order Mildred Ashton belonged. I worked and she watched, for the greater part of the afternoon, without any talk worth mentioning. I learned no more about her than her name, and gathered no more otherwise than that she was poor, lived outside the gates of the world, and loved her art in a very different fashion from mine. I felt as if, until to-day, I had been living—no, not living—existing—without a soul.

In a word, I was not the same Arthur Kenrick who had come down to Llanpwell. That evening's trout, it is true, had rather gained in flavour, and that night's sleep in depth and sweetness; but I knew, when I rose next morning, that I was a new man, wofully dissatisfied with the old one. I had been drinking the cold dull water of selfishness for eight-and-twenty years; yesterday I had taken my first taste of life's nectar. But such tastes do not quench the thirst for many hours. I went as straight to the place where I had

met Mildred Ashton as if I could have fairly hoped to drink there a second time. I had no right to hope; but, nevertheless, in the same spot I found her again, working harder than before; nor, when she saw me, did she show the faintest affectation of surprise. Strangers as we were, and short-lived as my new self had been—not a whole day old—I felt half angry that she should treat me as if I were so utterly a nobody. I fancied I should have been better pleased had she stayed away that day. But then that would have shown self-consciousness; and it was the absence of every hint of possible self-consciousness that was her greatest charm—perhaps the whole source of her charm.

There was no reason why I should not work within sight and speech of her; and so I did, with no barrier but my own increasing shyness between her and me. We talked a little, but not much, between whiles, and then mostly about my own experiences of art and travel, in which she took the interest of one who has had no such experiences of her own. But even in such somewhat one-sided talk I could not help learning more about her than I knew yesterday. She lived in a far-away part of England—a flat uninteresting country of which I knew nothing. She was staying with some relations at a farm with an unpronounceable name some few miles away, and spent the whole of her time in sketching out of doors. She had some other relations in Shanghai, with whom she corresponded sometimes, and through whom she had heard of my uncle George in a slight and casual way. She had neither father nor mother, brother nor sister, and no doubt depended on the relations with whom she was staying until she could support herself by her pencil.

When I left her that day all the pleasure of my new life had gone, and the beginning of its pain had come. And whether such pleasure or such pain be the better, is more than I can tell.

How our meetings grew into a habit, very matter of course on her part, full of excitement on mine, would be far too long to say. There was certainly nothing unnatural, however unconventional, in the growth of a friendship between two would-be artists of whom one wanted help and the other wanted—everything. We had found one another in a world to which conventions did not belong, and in which people soon learn to know each other apart from the accidents of fortune. There was certainly no very great harm for her to find out in me, and there was nothing but good in her. Let me leap to the end at once—I knew that I had found her who must be my wife, whatever else she might be; and sometimes I hoped, and sometimes despaired.

But why, you will ask, should I despair—I, a favourite of Fortune, who would be very rich some day, and was rich enough already—of winning a poor girl without friends or means? Ah, but that was just the thing that troubled me! With all my faith in her, I dreaded the thought of buying her hand to an almost morbid degree. Had she been rich I should have had a hundred times less fear. I must win her as the poor painter I seemed, or not at all; she must not be exposed for a moment to the temptation of taking me because I was rich; and if she took me with that knowledge I should never be able to rid myself of the doubt that she might never have taken me had I been poor. From the moment that my heart made itself up to win her I took every chance I could of acting out the

part of the struggling artist without a penny, whose whole fortune is in the air. It would be time enough for her to learn the truth when she was won—if that was ever to be ; if she was not altogether beyond and above my winning, as I very largely feared. Her manner was the same towards me as on the very first day. And yet I had not reached that point when a man would rather have a 'No' than no answer at all. It was first love with me, remember, in which only the most hopeless fools can possibly be altogether wise.

I have said that I never dreamed. But one night, after a long afternoon spent in Mildred's company, a new and strange experience happened to me. I *did* dream. Regular and experienced dreamers may not think my dream a particularly strange or remarkable one. But it was remarkably strange to me, just because it was a Dream.

It was not of Mildred. Professed dreamers tell me that dreams very seldom relate to the days which they follow : that the fulness of the heart may be often the moving cause, but very rarely fashions the form. It seemed to me, with extraordinary vividness, that some genii of an Arabian midnight had transported me from Llanpwl to Shanghai. At least I suppose it must have been Shanghai, though the place was more like what, in my waking fancies, I imagine Peking, or any typically Chinese city, to be. I can remember noticing, without any surprise, that all the houses, and even many of the people who crowded the streets, were made of porcelain, mostly blue and white, and all exceedingly small : the buildings did not reach above my shoulders, nor the people much above my knees. Nobody, however, noticed me, and this did surprise me a little, though I have been told that

incapacity for feeling surprise at anything is the grand test of a dream. So, if this theory be correct, I was not dreaming at all, but was really in Shanghai, or Peking, or wherever it may be. I walked about the streets, in search of some unknown something, careful not to crack any of the porcelain with the large stick I carried. Presently I had a curious feeling of laborious oppression, especially about the knees, which seemed to have become suddenly loaded with lead, so heavy to lift were they. I still laboured on ; and the oppression I felt took an external form, as if my own personality extended itself outwardly from me to everything about me. The air became a thick yellow cloud, very hot, and almost stifling, with a disagreeable flavour, like what I suppose a London fog in the dog-days would be. How I managed to enter one of the porcelain dolls' houses, I know not ; but I must have done so, for I presently found myself in a large room, papered all over with playing cards. And there I saw uncle George.

It did not surprise me that he was standing upright in a brass candlestick—that seemed quite as natural as that he was burning in some indescribable manner with a wick and a flame. If I shut my eyes I can see it all now as clearly as then, for never was any waking impression more vivid ; and yet for the life of me I cannot describe the exact manner in which he was identified with a lighted candle. The really extraordinary part of the matter was that the flat dish of the candlestick had two stems, and that in the second, and in like manner, burned the figure of a woman, whose face did not seem wholly strange to me, though I could not connect it with any face I had ever seen. I could not tell whether uncle George saw me or

no. He and the woman became more and more distinctly candle-like without losing their original natures; in a way, they were being transformed into candles without in the least ceasing to be entirely themselves. I did not in any way confuse myself with what I saw—another unusual feature, I am told, in a dream. Presently the melted grease began to run down, and to encircle the human candles with broad spiral folds. I counted the folds as they formed themselves with singular regularity—One: two: three: four: five: six: seven: eight: nine: a tenth was half formed, when suddenly the two flames began to splutter, and then to leap and flicker. I saw that they were on the point of going out, and wondered which of the two would be the first to go. It was the woman—out she went, and I saw her no more. My uncle still burned on, but always in the same unwholesome way. Sometimes his flame started up, yellow and clear; sometimes it spluttered down to a blue point, like the light of a glowworm. I was about to speak to him, when out he went also; and, after a rush through leagues of air, I found myself transported back from China to my bed at Llanpwll, as unrefreshed as if my journey had been real.

‘So that’s dreaming, is it?’ thought I. ‘I suppose it’s all right to experience everything just once, but if it depends upon me, I’ll never try *that* again. It seems to me uncommonly like a spasm of lunacy; and where the pleasure of it lies I can’t see. And yet I’m as certain that I saw uncle George turned into a candle, with my own eyes, as I am that I see the wall before me. And in the same candlestick with a woman—that’s too utterly absurd.’ I leaped out of bed, and in ten minutes was in full swim across the little lake

below the inn. By the time I had reached the other side the dream had left me—like a dream.

But the lake did not prove Lethe, for long. While I was going to the place where I now knew I should find Mildred, the grotesque scene of the human candles burning out in a room made of playing cards came back to me in all its vividness, and made me feel most absurdly uncomfortable. I suppose people who often dream get used to such night adventures; as for me, I could not convince my unreason that what I had seen was absolutely unreal. It was a relief to me when I saw Mildred again; for need I say that my heart had been filled with heavy forebodings about *her* by this idiotic dream?

‘Do you ever have dreams, Miss Ashton?’

‘Very often. Why?’

‘Then perhaps you can read me mine.’ I told her my story; and telling it in the fresh air under the light of the sun proved a better way of putting it into the light of nonsense than even my plunge into the lake had been.

‘It is certainly a very odd sort of nightmare,’ said she. ‘But I fancy you are wrong in thinking that it had nothing to do with the day. I daresay we had mentioned your uncle; no doubt you had been thinking about him, and a dream of China of course would suggest a great deal of china-ware. The fog and the weight of the knees are signs of unpleasant dreams that everybody knows. Of course, since you tell me that your uncle is a woman-hater you would naturally see a woman with him in a dream; and as to the candles and the flat brass candlestick—what was the last thing you saw or did before sleeping? You put out your candle, I suppose; and—’

‘And it was in a flat brass candle-

stick? That it certainly was. Well, I suppose you are right as usual, and that there was really nothing out of the common in recognising one's uncle in a candle. I certainly don't see what it could portend: most decidedly it can never come true. You say you dream; have you ever known a dream come true?

'Never, strange to say.'

'Strange? I should have thought all the strangeness would be the other way, if all dreams were like mine.'

'But they are not all like yours,' said Mildred. 'And surely it is almost a miracle, out of the millions and millions of dreams that are dreamed every night all over the world, so few thousands should happen by chance to be fulfilled. The fewness of their fulfilments is the most wonderful thing about dreams.'

'Well, my uncle is not likely to turn into a candle, anyhow. However, I'm glad to think that my brain had some foundation of fact to build upon—'

'If you were used to dreaming, you would think nothing of it, indeed. I have much stranger dreams than that, often and often; but I take them as a matter of course, and never think of them after waking.'

I wished with all my heart that she would take things less as a matter of course. Would she take it as a matter of course that I should ask her to be my wife, and that she should say no? But there was not much chance of letting one's own thoughts take the bit between their teeth in her company. She had an insatiable appetite for what I looked upon as hard work, but which never wearied her. I believe I had done twice as much work in these few weeks as in a whole year before—not that this is to say a great

deal. Before long my dream was absolutely forgotten once more—no doubt had it not been a new experience, it would, as she had said, have been absolutely forgotten long ago.

But presently it came back, in quite a new way. Had it not led the way to the interpretation of another dream? It needed some courage to risk putting an end to the idyl of Llanpwll. But it had to be done; I felt as if something would keep the end from ever coming unless it came to-day.

'I have not told you the whole of my dream yet,' said I at last, laying down my brush. 'Shall I tell you the rest? Though it seems impossible you should need to be told. There; I will and I *must* tell you. All day long I am dreaming that I love you—no, *that* is no dream—but that I have told you so, and that you have said— But why am I talking about dreams? If you haven't guessed that I loved you the first day I saw you, once for all, you know it now. Don't say we know nothing of one another yet, for we do—'

So much I know I said; I am not such an impostor as to pretend that I can repeat the rest of the words in which I asked Mildred to marry me. Were the sentences quite coherent, grammatical, and full of meaning for strange ears, in which you asked your wife (if you have one) to marry you—always supposing that you loved her below the depth of your tongue, and had more fear than hope of her answer? I spoke on with my whole heart; I looked in her face, not knowing what to read. It was full of what might mean a thousand things. I did not dare to hold out my hand; only while I spoke I was listening for the faintest shadow of a coming word. At last, as we stood face

to face, her lips parted, and began to move.

'Mildred!' cried a sharp elderly voice from behind the corner of the rock. 'Mildred! where in the name of mercy have you been?'

Could anything have been more horribly unlucky than the sudden appearance of this old lady just then and there? She had made no sign for weeks; it was as if she had been watching for the precise moment when she would be most in the way. I may wrong her; but I thought her the most evil-looking monster that had ever been seen—and had she been as young and as beautiful as Mildred herself, I should have thought the same. In point of fact she was very elderly and very plain; and I multiplied her in both directions by ten.

Mildred herself, for the first time, seemed to lose her self-possession, and to turn pale.

'My aunt, Miss Reynolds—Mr. Kenrick,' she said falteringly.

Miss Reynolds scarcely deigned to curtsy; I just managed to bow.

'So!' said Miss Reynolds, turning her shoulder towards me contemptuously, and speaking to Mildred. 'So this is the meaning of your painting mania, is it; your scarlet and yellow fever, eh? Coming out to meet young men, alone. Perhaps you think I haven't known it all along, and that I didn't think there was more Art about it all than you'd have me believe—and Nature; stuff! Human nature, you mean. I guessed as much, and now I know. You'll please to come home with me. Come.'

'Miss Reynolds,' said I, recovering my presence of mind, 'I am not going to leave this spot till I know whether your niece will be my wife or no. And as to her, she no more knew until to-day that I love her—'

'Not leave this spot? You'll have to take root in it, then, young man; or rather you may leave it as soon as you like, for I say to you, No!'

'It is from herself that I must—' I began, trying to be as courteous to Mildred's aunt as she would allow me.

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Miss Reynolds. 'And who, pray, are you? What have you to do with the matter, I should like to know?'

'Everything in the world. My name is Kenrick—Arthur Kenrick; I am an artist—'

'So I perceive, sir, from your clothes. May I ask, since you presume to my niece's hand, if you are an R.A.?'

'Not yet, Miss Reynolds; nor an Associate, even. But—'

'An exhibitor, no doubt. Can you give me the name of one of your works that has been hung on the line?'

'I have never as yet exhibited a picture. But—'

'I am aware,' said Miss Reynolds, throwing a studiously veiled note of sarcasm into her tone, 'that many famous painters keep aloof from the Academy on principle. It is only right I should know the circumstances as well as the name of the—the—person who tries to entrap my niece into a secret engagement without my leave. No doubt, though you do not exhibit, you sell your works for large sums?'

'I have not yet sold a picture, Miss Reynolds. But—'

'You mean to tell me you are a common drawing-master?' she said, with scorn unveiled.

'I am not even that,' said I. 'But if I were—'

'You have been saying "But" five hundred times. "But" what, if you please? I can't stay here all day.'

'I was going to tell you, Miss

Reynolds, that though I am not yet a famous painter, I am of, I hope, sufficient respectability and means. My father was a well-known and wealthy colonial broker in London ; I am his eldest son—'

'Ah!' said Miss Reynolds, with genuine interest in her voice. 'You only paint for amusement, then—though I don't see why a gentleman should go about in a coat as shabby as yours. Your father, I am to understand, died a wealthy man, and you are his heir?'

'I was speaking then of my respectability only—not of my means. I have not inherited anything from my father. My brothers and sisters are his heirs. But—'

'“But” number five hundred and one! I see. You offended your father by turning vagabond artist, and he very properly cut you off with a shilling, though you are his eldest son. I thought a gentleman would have made love in more decent clothes, smelling less like a pothouse. Good-morning, Mr. Kenrick, and better luck next time.'

What was I to say to the old virago? I could not bring myself to speak of my real means and settled expectations until Mildred herself had answered me; and this treatment of me because I seemed poor, and her insults towards my brothers in art, made any course but silence on this score impossible. To Mildred I would of course tell everything so soon as she had answered me; but to Miss Reynolds, not a word.

'Very well, then,' said I. 'In the character of a poor unknown landscape painter, disinherited—if you will have it so—for preferring art to trade, but too honest to cheat his tailor, I demand to know from Miss Ashton's own lips whether she will give me any hope that she will ever be my wife or no—if *she*

knows me well enough to trust her happiness in my hands. I do not think she will refuse me that hope because I am poor.'

'O, if it comes to that,' said Miss Reynolds, 'I'll go and pick a gooseberry or two with pleasure. I'm not afraid of what Mildred will say to you now—*she knows my will.*'

I did not notice her last words just then. They seemed to signify merely that, whatever she willed, others must obey. And besides, Mildred, who had been standing by in silence, spoke at last, and she said:

'Aunt Jane, you need not go. I would rather say before you, just now, everything that I have to say. I know you have meant to be kind to me, and I have tried to be grateful; but I must live my own life, after all. I had found that out before I knew—before Mr. Kenrick; everybody has to find it out at first or at last, I suppose. I should have become a very bad companion for you. Yes, I do know Mr. Kenrick, I hope and I believe. I hope he knows me as well! I am glad that he is poor, and that he—'

She said no more, but she gave me her hand.

II.

So my dream had proved an omen after all, in so far as so exceptional a thing (for me) as a dream of any sort had immediately preceded, and been bound up with, the gain of my Mildred's hand. It may be that, in the elementary sort of dream philosophy which makes dreaming of one thing prognosticate an event of an entirely remote and different kind, to dream that one's uncle is turned into a candle may foreshadow one's own marriage—whether that be so or

otherwise, experts will be able to tell. However that may be, in a new life the dream had very soon become an old and forgotten story.

Mildred's history turned out to be a very simple one, after all, as she told it to me, though it was by no means what I had imagined. She and the cousin of whom she had spoken were the nieces of Miss Reynolds, a rich, somewhat eccentric, exceedingly capricious, and extravagantly obstinate old lady, who had adopted Mildred in a very much less generous fashion than uncle George had adopted me. Mildred had tried her best to be grateful, but had found it absolutely impossible. She had a very strong nature and decided character, which Miss Reynolds, out of some uncomfortable mixture of duty, whim, and delight in tyranny for its own sake, had set herself to thwart and distort in every imaginable way. From what I could gather, Miss Reynolds was one of those people who cannot exist without a dependent on whom to exercise their passion for power, and who believe that power consists wholly in making other people conscious slaves. There are such men in thousands; such women in tens of thousands. No wonder that Mildred, having a spirit of her own, had been driven to rebel. Her idea was to make herself independent by learning how to paint pictures that would sell, and then to take her own life, so far as she could, into her own hands. I congratulated myself, more than I can say, on having let her believe that I was as poor as I seemed; and I resolved, in the same spirit, to keep up the part I had assumed until, on our wedding-day, I could give my wife the pleasant surprise of finding that, in following her heart, she had not condemned herself to a life of poverty and toil. Meanwhile the romance of our en-

gagement would be doubled for me, and she would have the zest of feeling that she was sacrificing the world for love and liberty.

I would, for my own pleasure in its memory, linger upon the days of my courtship among the hills round Llanpwll. It had all the charms of romance for us both, without there being any real reason to fear that all would not end well. I hardly know whether to call it the best or the worst of our engagement that it was so short and flying. I was impatient for its close; but I lingered then upon every hour of it, just as in remembrance I do now. But it was impossible that it should be long. Mildred was ready to face the poorest, hardest, and most laborious life with me, and was proud to show how content she was to become the wife of one who would have no wealth but her. But there were pressing reasons why there should be no delays in our marriage, save such as the law compelled. Mildred, having rebelled against her aunt, was without either a home or means to find one, for Miss Reynolds simply cast her off without a word. I took lodgings for her at a farm, and within a month of our troth-plight married her in the little church of Llanpwll.

It was certainly a marriage in haste, and possibly many may think that I ought to have waited till I had written to uncle George and had received an answer from him. Very likely I ought to have done so; but, at the same time, I do not feel very much conscience-stricken by my omission. I knew him to be so generous, kind, full of sympathy with every right impulse, and regardless of anything like self-interest, that not even his own anti-matrimonial principles would stand in my way. He liked people to act for themselves, and

hated nothing, not even strange women, more than the idea of being thought tyrannical. I was so anxious that he should take Mildred to his heart as a daughter, that I could not bring myself to prejudice him against her by letting him know of her existence before it was too late for him to do anything but make the best of an exceedingly good bargain ; for if he could only be surprised into seeing Mildred without warning, he would receive her even into his misogynistic heart, I was sure. Besides, it would take much too long for letters to pass and repass between Wales and China when I was going to marry Mildred, whatever their tenor might be. I was my own master, and he wished me to be so ; for Miss Reynolds did not detest free women more than uncle George hated slaves.

So I wrote to Shanghai the day after my wedding-day, and we remained at Llanpwll for our honeymoon. I could not even yet bring myself to tell Mildred that she was not the wife of a poor and struggling painter. I almost wished myself one in reality, for she made the illusion as sweet to me as it was dear to her. But she must know it at last ; and though I was sorry to leave our first married home, I looked forward to the morrow when I should take her back with me to London and to the real life that was to be ours till the end of our days, so that London should become better and dearer even than Llanpwll.

It was the morning of our return. I had taken my last plunge into the lake, and was on my way back to breakfast, fresh and hungry, when Mildred met me half-way with a letter in her hand.

'There's a letter for you, too,' said she. 'But I couldn't wait for you to show you this. See

what I have brought on myself,' she said, with the brightest and happiest of smiles, 'by marrying you ?'

'Mildred,' the letter began, 'I waited to see if you were really so lost to all sense of shame as to marry that man in rags in opposition to my irrevocable commands. You have done so ; and, as you make your bed, so you must lie. Understand that henceforth you are to have no expectations from me. If you had been commonly grateful, and had married to please me or had remained with me, you may be gratified to know that I had intended to make you my sole heir. As it is, I, on the day after your disgrace, made my will. Whom I have put in your place is no concern of yours. Enough that Scripture bids us give much to those who have much, and that I am your aunt who is ashamed of you,

'JANE REYNOLDS.

'P.S. If the man in rags is disappointed to find he has married a beggar, you can't say I didn't tell you so.'

'Are you disappointed?' asked she.

'You have lost a fortune for my sake? Mildred, did you know this when—'

'When I married you? Of course I knew it, very well ; only if I hadn't married you, I should have done something else to lose it soon enough all the same. If I couldn't serve aunt Jane for love, it isn't likely I should for anything less, I suppose.'

'Dear, if I tell you that I have been keeping a secret from you ever since we were married, shall you be very angry indeed ?'

I could see a half-frightened look come into her face.

'A secret? what do you mean? You see that, after all, she had

no reasonable reason for knowing that I was not an adventurer who had somehow found out that she had expectations from a rich aunt, and *was* disappointed with my bargain on finding that her expectations had gone off to the other side of the moon, where all the lost things are; or that I had not two or three other wives elsewhere; or that I was not a professional burglar, or anything else she would not like to be married to. I know she did not suspect anything of the sort, for Mildred was always the most unreasonable of women where I happen to be concerned; but still a secret a whole honeymoon long has an unpleasant sound, whatever it may be, and I felt a little sorry that I had done anything to make her ever so little afraid. Happily, though, it was a secret that would very well bear telling.

We had reached the house, and were entering our breakfast-room.

'Should you be very angry,' I asked, 'if I tell you that I have been deceiving you from the beginning, and that instead of being what I told you—there, darling, it's out now—I *am* a painter; but the reason I've done nothing as yet is because I've always been too well off to be anything but lazy. You can't expect much from a man with an uncle George like mine. We're rich enough already to do without your aunt's legacy; and my own father left me nothing because it was a family arrangement that uncle George will leave me everything. He's a splendid fellow, and you'll be as fond of him as I am when he comes home again. I couldn't find the heart to prevent your doing the brave thing you did in taking a man without a penny, all for love and liberty—and now I find out that you've lost a fortune by it, I'm gladder still. Why didn't you

tell me you had something to lose?'

'Are you the only one to have secrets? Well, then, *I* wanted *you* to be sure that you married me for myself; and I was afraid—'

'No, you weren't; you were no more afraid I should marry you for anything but yourself than that you—'

'I was afraid you would rather not marry me at all than let me lose anything for you. There!'

'We're quits, then; and we'll have no secrets any more. . . But here's my letter lying here unopened all this while, and taking up the room where a trout or two ought to be. Hullo! From uncle George's lawyer? What can he have to say? "Dear Sir,—I regret—"'

The first words silenced me. And I read, no further aloud:

'Dear Sir,—I regret to have to inform you that I am by this post advised of the death, at Shanghai, of Mr. George Kenrick, your uncle, on the 21st ultimo. An epidemic of cholera is raging there, to which he fell one of the first victims. You will be exceedingly surprised to learn that *he was married* last May to a lady at Shanghai. Mrs. Kenrick was also taken with cholera, and died, by a remarkable coincidence, *on the very same day*. I can only suppose that his well-known views and principles concerning matrimony made him unwilling to inform either his family or his solicitors of his marriage at the time, and have also been the cause of his otherwise unaccountable delay in making it known. As the marriage was so recent, I need hardly say that he has left no children. Most unfortunately, however, it appears that he died intestate. The last will he made is in our hands, under which the whole of his estate

(wholly consisting of personalty) is bequeathed to yourself as sole legatee. But, as you are doubtless aware, every will is revoked by the marriage of the testator ; and we are advised that he was about to make a new will, almost as largely in your favour, when he died. In effect, therefore, he died intestate ; and the practical result is that (Mrs. Kenrick being dead) you will be entitled to no more than your share of the estate after distribution. For your guidance, and pending proceedings, I may tell you that I expect the estate to realise about 90,000*l.* This will give about 9000*l.* for each of Mr. George Kenrick's ten brothers and sisters who either survive him or have left surviving issue. The 9000*l.* which would have come to your father will be divided among his nine children, giving to yourself the share of about 1000*l.*, which, deducting succession duty, will give you, in the result, not more than a clear balance of 970*l.*

'I estimate that the amount coming to you may prove less, but cannot well amount to more.

'I shall be happy to see you and give further particulars any time you can give me a call.'

I handed the letter to Mildred without a word. Why had I not put off telling her I was rich for one single half-hour more ? Nine hundred and seventy pounds—not fifty pounds a year—for a man who had been carefully taught how *not* to earn his living, who at thirty years old had not even made a beginning, whose so-called profession had been but pastime, who had nothing else to turn to, who had been deliberately trained to exaggerated ignorance of business, and who had just married a wife whose means amounted to nothing ! Who could quite have forgotten himself, and one far dearer than himself,

in grief for the best uncle who ever lived in the world ? I could see it all—how George Kenrick's dread and shyness of women had been only the instinctive self-defence of an exceptionally tender-hearted man ; how one woman at last had, as a matter of course, caught his heart, and had proved too much even for the elaborate outworks with which he had guarded it round ; how, after all his open and notorious boasts and scorns, he had felt the shame of a man who had proved himself a rank impostor, and had kept putting off the evil day of having to tell ; how—always an easy-going procrastinating man—he had in like manner put off making a new will, which would record his inconsistency in black and white, and would, indeed, be very difficult to settle in such a way as to do justice both to his wife and her possible children, and to me. . .

'You have married a poor devil of a painter after all,' said I, as Mildred laid the letter down ; 'and you might have been—'

'Hush !' said Mildred. 'I might have been wicked and miserable and rich. I am just as happy now as I was when I only believed that we were poor ; and that is, the happiest girl in the world ! Surely *you* don't want money so much as to make you forget that he is dead who meant to be so good to you ?'

And then I knew that, though I had married in haste, I should never have to repent at leisure. I think that in that moment I first became a man.

III.

But it was a terribly up-hill road that lay before me now. Even when that nine hundred and



'She sketched the scene, and I, not being a good enough sketcher, sketched her.'

seventy pounds should come into my hands, it would not mean fifty pounds a year, for I owed at least five hundred. If I could get in the end so much as four hundred pounds out of the ninety thousand I should be fortunate; and even that I must still further diminish by anticipation, in order to live for to-day. It is not good to belong to a very large family when personalty has to be divided.

It was wonderful how uncles, aunts, and cousins turned up their noses at my calling now that I had to earn my daily bread with it instead of carrying it on as uncle George's whim. Even my brothers had to admit that there was no room in their offices for an amateur artist who had been fool enough to saddle himself with a penniless wife, and to whom accounts were Hebrew and Chaldee. They were right—except in calling Mildred's husband a fool. I could not be of any use to them for years to come, and then I should be too old for a junior clerk or office-boy. I must paint—paint—paint, since that was all I could do, and become an artist, if I could, in fact as well as in name. I should very likely have thrown away my brush if Mildred had not been beside me. But she believed in me, and found heart and courage for two till she made me share them.

Nor was she idle. While I went at my work with patient effort, she threw herself into hers with joy. I verily believe she was glad to find that poverty and labour had not turned out to be dreams, after all. We lived in three rooms—and lived like hermits, except when we went out together on impromptu holidays to enjoy ourselves nearly as much as we did at home. In time, what with lessons and with occasional sales in very bad markets, we earned something, and made believe that

we were beginning to make our own fortunes with our own hands. She was always so bright and gay that I forgot to be as careful over her as I ought to have been, and had not the heart to measure the work for her, over which she found her life so well filled. Mine, I felt, was hard work; hers looked like play, though it took up nearly as many hours as it did of mine.

But I must add that, at accounts and economies, she was nearly as bad a hand as I. There were times when we lived neither she nor I knew how. But at last there came a time when we found ourselves consciously face to face with the wolf at the door; and Love, though he did not even dream of so much as the shadow of a glance towards the bolt of the window, did not reconcile us to the growl.

Unwillingly enough, I had to lay down my brush for a while, and to look about for work out of doors, since none seemed coming to me. Meanwhile, Mildred set to work on a real picture in the spirit of a real artist who can never be divorced from Hope, do what he will. Away from her easel she was the most modest-minded of women; but, when she worked, she seemed to be fired with some spirit that was strangely like ambition, though I am sure it was really nothing of the kind. It was a fine subject that she had thought over till it had become a part of herself; and, though her technical skill was still very imperfect, it already showed qualities that are beyond the reach of scores of far better painters.

I knew she was working at it hard, but how hard I never knew—till one afternoon I came back from giving some lessons at a school, and found her in a dead faint upon the floor. And then, and not till then, I learned how, as soon as my back was turned

early in the morning, she had been toiling, hungry and alone, every minute of the day until I returned ; how energy had burned into fever ; how genius, without corresponding vital strength, is nothing better than a disease.

And I had thought that mine alone had been work, and that hers had been pleasure and play ; and how could I, while away from her, have guessed how a delicate girl would have spent all her hours ? I had not learned to know Mildred, even then—and was the knowledge only to come when it was too late, when— I could not finish the thought. I got her to bed, and then went for the nearest doctor as fast as I could go.

At three houses, with red lamps and brass plates, I knocked and rang before I found surgeon or physician at home at an hour when most were going their rounds. At last, by good fortune I found one at home where the plate bore the name of 'Mr. E. Segrave, Surgeon and Accoucheur.'

I waited for what seemed an age, though I doubt whether two minutes had passed on the clock-dial. At last the door opened.

'Dr. Segrave?' I began eagerly.

'Not Dr. Segrave,' said a tall, cool, shrewd-looking Scotchman who entered ; 'I'm Dr. Menzies, and I am attending to my friend's patients while he gets a little holiday.'

'Never mind,' I said, more hurriedly than politely, 'it's all the same.'

In five minutes more—for he seemed to have the art of doing things slowly faster than other people do them quickly—he was by Mildred's bedside, I waiting for him in terrible anxiety by the half-finished picture into which she had been putting her actual life day by day. At last he came back. 'Well?

'From what you tell me, and from what I can see, she's prostrate from hard work, and want of air and exercise, and star—well, from not taking time enough to her meals. She wants rest, and plenty of meat, and change of air ; and let me tell you that you must look after her well, for I think she is one of those women that look after everybody but themselves.'

'There's no danger, then ?'

'There's no worse danger on earth than working too much and eating too little. But if you mean is there anything wrong with her that cannot be mended—not at all. Eating's the easiest thing in the world, and doing nothing's easier still. And that's all *she's* got to do if you can manage it.'

A weight was lifted off my heart ; but I guessed what he meant—and that his prescription might prove harder to carry out than he knew. 'You will call again ?'

'I'll see how your wife is getting on before I go ; but I am going abroad in a week. I shall tell Mr. Segrave of the case, if you give me your name.'

'Kenrick. And thank you for—'

'Kenrick ! Indeed ! I once had a patient of that name out in Shanghai. I'll write a prescription—'

'What ! you knew my uncle, Mr. Kenrick of Shanghai ?'

'Yes. I was called in to attend him when he died in the cholera outbreak. Husband and wife both in one day. It was an awful time with us ; people dying around in whole households ; it was like a nightmare—'

'And strangely enough I *had* a nightmare on the very eve of my uncle's death, in which I seemed to feel it all, just as if I was there. Yes, *on the very night before he died.*'

'Nightmare's common and death's common; it would be strange if they didn't meet together now and then.'

'I dreamed of the cholera cloud. I saw a Chinese city. I did not know my uncle was married; and yet I saw him and a woman turn together into corpse-candles, and die out together before my eyes. I seem to see it now. It was hideously grotesque; but I did not recover from it for a whole day.'

'Working too little and eating too much is as bad for the brain, you'll find, as working too much and eating too little. Anybody that knew George Kenrick would be sure to dream about a woman if they dreamed of him, just because of the way he used to talk of them.'

'Nevertheless, it was a strange dream, even in detail—'

'We can try that,' said Dr. Menzies, getting interested. 'You say they were turned into corpse-candles, burning one against the other. Did you know which was he and which was she?'

'I knew them both to the end.'

'Then you can tell which of them burned out first. If you're wrong, it will show that your dream was but a partial coincidence, just as I say. You would naturally dream of a near kinsman, and be safe to dream of a woman for the reason I gave. You knew he was in China, and might have seen in the newspapers—though you might have forgotten—that there was cholera in Shanghai. But you could scarcely know which died the first, unless I tell you; for nobody was in the two rooms where they died but a Presbyterian minister and myself.'

'Her candle went out the first,' said I. 'I remember counting ten, and then his followed hers.'

'That's right enough,' said Dr. Menzies, a little surprised at last. 'It was she who died the first,

and—you counted *ten*? It was just *ten minutes* by the watch before he followed her. Well, all I can say is that—'

'It's something more than strange?'

'No, Mr. Kenrick. It seemed a little strange at first, but on second thoughts, no! If you dreamed one went out before the other, it must have been one of the two, and it was no more than the chances of heads or tails which one it would be. If I throw up a penny and you guess heads, and it is heads, you were just as likely to be right as wrong. There's nothing about it that's either strange or not strange. That there are not more such coincidences than there are is almost a miracle. There's no such thing as waste in Nature, Mr. Kenrick. And if a dream like that was more than a common ordinary coincidence, it would be waste; for what would be the use of your dreaming that one of your candles went out before the other when the fact itself could be of no manner of use to you?'

Even so had Mildred herself argued; and I was perforce compelled to put up with a chain of reasoning in which her imaginative nature agreed with the prosaic system of Dr. Menzies. Certainly mine had been a useless dream, and must have been useless by its very nature. I had nothing more to say.

It was merely accident that had made me remember my nonsensical dream when Mildred lay ill, and it went fairly out of my mind again as soon as Dr. Menzies had gone. Mildred had fallen asleep; and I sat and watched by her bedside, thinking how I could contrive to put life straight for her. She had no friends to shelter her from the daily troubles of our life till she should be strong enough to face

them again ; and my marriage, even more than the loss of my fortune, had made my relations cease to be my friends. Perhaps I was wrong, but I could not bring myself to ask favours—that is to say, charities—from those who now regarded me as a ne'er-do-well, and Mildred as a blunder and a burden. I was a stranger in the land ; no more a Kenrick, who had a right to the help and countenance of other Kenricks, than Mildred herself. My share in my uncle's estate had gone long ago ; over five hundred in paying old debts, the rest in keeping us going while we had been working and waiting, now, as it seemed, in vain. Without Hope by my side in the person of Mildred, I felt that I must lay down my brush once for all, and find something or anything to do that would insure her health, however uncongenial it might be.

The idea of emigration came uppermost in my mind. I had not neglected my body, and could use my hands in better ways than in painting pictures that nobody would buy. But since Mildred must go out with me, and since she could not travel till she was well, and since I must, being no longer a bachelor, carry out with me some sort of means or capital, even emigration did not look particularly hopeful.

However, I managed next day to leave Mildred for an hour or two while I went out to make inquiries about colonial matters in such quarters as were open to me. I needed advice, and could think of none better worth having than that of Mr. Archer, a young lawyer, who had always been, in a way, one of my friends in old times. He was a shrewd man of business, with an essentially practical way of looking at everything, but with no intolerance for people of different natures. He would give me

the best advice he could, I was sure.

'I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting,' he said. 'But I was very deeply engaged, and I'm afraid I can't give you much time now. So you think of giving up painting and going abroad? Well, it does not sound badly. Only, as a married man, you can hardly treat emigration as a simple adventure, and go out with nothing in your pockets but your hands. I must think it over. Sit down and have a chat—it's a long time since we met, you and I. Not since we've been married men. We've both had our romances, it seems. But I'm hanged if there's any romance in all your Bohemia that beats what we find every day in the law. Talk of fiction! Why, if I wanted that sort of light reading, and had to choose between the novels and magazines on the one hand and the law reports on the other, give me the law reports any day. Do you know why lawyers are so notoriously fonder of reading novels than any other men? It's because they get *blasés* with romance, and want to refresh themselves with solid, probable, heavy prose. I was up to the eyes in a queer story when you came in, or rather in a wild sort of riddle that will take all the courts together years to solve. It beats *me*. A, you see, makes a will. Next to the law of marriage for conundrums give me the law of wills. All A's estate is left to B, a married woman. We'll call B's husband C. Very well. If B, the wife, dies and leaves children behind her, the estate goes to the children. If B, the wife, dies and leaves no children, but C, the husband, survives her, the estate goes to *him*. If B, the wife, dies and leaves neither children nor husband surviving, then the estate goes to a distant relation, D. That, avoid-

ing technical language, is the effect of the will. And you'd never guess how such a plain-sailing every-day will as that could possibly become likely to puzzle the House of Lords.'

'No,' said I, already puzzled myself between A, B, C, and D, 'I certainly do not see.'

'It comes to this. First of all, B, the wife, dies. Afterwards A, the testator, dies. To whom does the estate go?'

'To B's children?'

'She had none.'

'To B's husband, then?'

'He is dead too.'

'To the distant relation, then?'

'D? You're missing the point—that's the very question that's got to be answered. If you'd been the least bit of a lawyer, you'd have asked me whether the wife survived the husband, or the husband the wife, you see. *Don't* you see? If the wife survived, the estate goes to the distant relation. If the husband survived, the estate goes to *him*.'

'But if he is dead?'

'That isn't the question. The question is, whether the estate goes to the distant relation, D. And, therefore, D must maintain that B, the wife, survived her husband.'

'And which did survive?'

'Now you're getting warmer! Heavens knows. They were found dead on the same day in two rooms of the same house, and so says the register. Get out of that if you can. It's an awful muddle. There's no rule of law. There are cases, of course—there always are. There's a great case where a man and a woman were washed off the same plank out at sea, and both drowned. On one side it has been argued that the man is likelier to survive because he's the stronger and the more selfish and the better able to swim. On the other side, that the woman is likelier to survive

because women have more vitality than men, and because a man naturally takes more care of a woman than he does of himself, especially if he's a sailor; and so on, and so on, through leagues of nonsense unspeakable. But it all comes to this—that there's no rule, that every case must stand on its own bottom, and that the courts will have facts, and nothing to do with fancies. Now Kenrick—why, that's the very name of the wife and the husband, B and C—that's queer! However, that has nothing to do with the question. The question is—'

'But it *is* queer!' said I. 'I had an uncle and an aunt who died in the same house on the same day. Did I never speak to you of my uncle George, of whom I was godson, eldest nephew, and almost son?'

'By George! It must be the very man. Not that I ever heard of your having any uncle in particular till now; or, if I ever did, I don't profess to remember pedigrees that I'm not paid to keep in mind. This was a George Kenrick, who, with his wife, died of cholera on the same day in Shanghai.'

'Yes, within ten minutes of one another. It is a terrible story—more than terrible to me.'

'Ten minutes? How do *you* know that? What do you mean?'

'I was told so by the doctor who attended them both and was with them when they died.'

'What! The doctor? Where is he? What's his name?'

'Dr. Menzies. I saw him yesterday—'

'Did he tell you *which* died first—he or—'

'She.'

'*She*! . . . Can you lay hands on Dr. Menzies . . . in an hour? You can? Then . . . Don't you understand? Under the will of Miss Reynolds—'

‘Miss Reynolds?’

‘Under the will of Miss Jane Reynolds, those ten minutes have given you an estate in Lincolnshire worth at least four thousand a year! For she left everything to a niece who married your uncle, and he survived her by ten minutes; and it is all real estate which goes to your uncle’s heir-at-law; and you, as the eldest son of his next brother, are he!’

I have been making a very long story very short indeed. My case was certainly as clear as daylight; but that, as Archer would say, is not the question, nor is it the question—though that, too, is a strange one—that Miss Reynolds, by disinheriting Mildred, had made the man in rags her sole heir. To me the strange thing is, and must remain, that all this could never have happened unless I had dreamed my dream. Had I not dreamed of the extinction of the candles in their proper order and of the number ten, I should never have mentioned the matter to Menzies, or learned the precise nature of the coincidence—if so it must still be called—from him. And, therefore, had it not been for my dream, I should have been without the one piece of evidence wanting to complete the chain and make good my legal title.

Nevertheless, I pass no definite opinion. I quite see that, being in an excited state of mind, I should be likely to dream; that, if I dreamed at all, it should be of uncle George; that, dreaming of him, I should dream of a woman; that, dreaming of two failing candles, one of them should go out without the other, and that it was a mere toss-up which went out the first of them. It is difficult to find even the elements of so common a thing

as a striking coincidence in so simple a matter. My readers must decide as they please.

But was this all? In one way it may be yes; but, in another, most surely no.

‘Mildred,’ said I to her one day, not so very long ago,—‘Mildred, I once had a very strange and a very wonderful dream. It was that I—I of all men—neither strong nor wise nor particularly brave, who had been selected, by some mysterious piece of injustice, to be the husband of the best, truest, and bravest of all the women in the world. I dreamed it so vividly, that I went out among the hills, and married the first girl I met before I knew anything about her, except that I loved her. Was not that a strange dream for a fairly sane man? Well, I woke up—one always must wake up at last from the very best of dreams, and from the best the soonest—and I found that *what my dream told me* was—’

‘What?’ asked Mildred, with at least a show of fear.

‘True!’ said I. And I say so still.

Truth, indeed, is always stranger than fiction. I add a few words which may interest the reader who is struck by the pivot of my narrative, and that narrow bridge of time which in *ten minutes* led to such important results.

The genial skilful physician who stood by and saw the two ‘life-candles’ burn out, and whose testimony in the case became so important, is at this moment a distinguished practitioner in ‘the Garden Isle,’ where his knowledge of the healing art and of the world together make him at once a most desirable ‘guide, philosopher, and friend.’

THE GULLY OF BLUEMANDYKE.

A true Colonial Story.

BROADHURST'S store was closed, but the little back room looked very comfortable that night. The fire cast a ruddy glow on ceiling and walls, reflecting itself cheerily on the polished flasks and shot-guns which adorned them. Yet a gloom rested on the two men who sat at either side of the hearth, which neither the fire nor the black bottle upon the table could alleviate.

'Twelve o'clock,' said old Tom, the storeman, glancing up at the wooden timepiece which had come out with him in '42. 'It's a queer thing, George, they haven't come.'

'It's a dirty night,' said his companion, reaching out his arm for a plug of tobacco. 'The Wawirra's in flood, maybe, or maybe their horses is broke down, or they've put it off, perhaps. Great Lord, how it thunders! Pass us over a coal, Tom.'

He spoke in a tone which was meant to appear easy, but with a painful thrill in it which was not lost upon his mate. He glanced uneasily at him from under his grizzled eyebrows.

'You think it's all right, George?' he said, after a pause.

'Think what's all right?'

'Why, that the lads are safe.'

'Safe! Of course they're safe. What the devil is to harm them?'

'O, nothing; nothing, to be sure,' said old Tom. 'You see, George, since the old woman died, Maurice has been all to me; and it makes me kinder anxious. It's a week since they started from the mine, and you'd ha' thought they'd

be here now. But it's nothing unusual, I s'pose; nothing at all. Just my darned folly.'

'What's to harm them?' repeated George Hutton again, arguing to convince himself rather than his comrade. 'It's straight road from the diggin's to Rathurst, and then through the hills past Bluemansdyke, and over the Wawirra by the ford, and so down to Trafalgar by the bush track. There's nothin' deadly in all that, is there? My son Allan's as dear to me as Maurice can be to you, mate,' he continued; 'but they know the ford well, and there's no other bad place. They'll be here to-morrow night, certain.'

'Please God they may!' said Broadhurst; and the two men lapsed into silence for some time, moodily staring into the glow of the fire, and pulling at their short clays.

It was indeed, as Hutton had said, a dirty night. The wind was howling down through the gorges of the western mountains, and whirling and eddying among the streets of Trafalgar; whistling through the chinks in the rough wood cabins, and tearing away the frail shingles which formed the roofs. The streets were deserted save for one or two stragglers from the drinking shanties, who wrapped their cloaks around them and staggered home through the wind and rain towards their own cabins.

The silence was broken by Broadhurst, who was evidently still ill at ease.

'Say, George,' he said, 'what's become of Josiah Mapleton?'

'Went to the diggin's.'

'Ay, but he sent word he was coming back.'

'But he never came.'

'An' what's become of Jos Humphrey?' he resumed, after a pause.

'He went diggin', too.'

'Well, did he come back?'

'Drop it, Broadhurst; drop it, I say,' said Hutton, springing to his feet and pacing up and down the narrow room. 'You're trying to make a coward of me! You know the men must have gone up country prospectin' or farmin' maybe. What is it to us where they went? You don't think I have a register of every man in the colony, as Inspector Burton has of the lags.'

'Sit down, George, and listen,' said old Tom. 'There's something queer about that road; something I don't understand and don't like. Maybe you remember how Maloney, the one-eyed scoundrel, made his money in the early mining days. He'd a half-way drinking shanty on the main road up on a kind of bluff, where the Lena comes down from the hills. You've heard, George, how they found a sort of wooden slide from his little back room down to the river; an' how it came out that man after man had had his drink doctored, and been shot down that into eternity, like a bale of goods. No one will ever know how many were done away with there. *They* were all supposed to be farmin' and prospectin' and the like, till their bodies were picked out of the rapids. It's no use mincing matters, George; we'll have the troopers along to the diggin's if those lads don't turn up by to-morrow night.'

'As you like, Tom,' said Hutton.

'By the way, talking of Maloney—it's a strange thing,' said Broad-

hurst, 'that Jack Haldane swears he saw a man as like Maloney with ten years added to him as could be. It was in the bush on Monday morning. Chance, I suppose; but you'd hardly think there could be two pair of shoulders in the world carrying such villanous mugs on the top of them.'

'Jack Haldane's a fool,' growled Hutton, throwing open the door and peering anxiously out into the darkness, while the wind played with his long grizzled beard, and sent a train of glowing sparks from his pipe down the street.

'A terrible night!' he said, as he turned back towards the fire.

Yes, a wild tempestuous night; a night for birds of darkness and for beasts of prey. A strange night for seven men to lie out in the gully at Bluemansdyke, with revolvers in their hands and the devil in their hearts.

The sun was rising after the storm. A thick heavy steam reeked up from the saturated ground, and hung like a pall over the flourishing little town of Trafalgar. A bluish mist lay in wreaths over the wide track of bushland around, out of which the western mountains loomed like great islands in a sea of vapour.

Something was wrong in the town. The most casual glance would have detected that. There was a shouting and a hurrying of feet. Doors were slammed and rude windows thrown open. A trooper of police came clattering down with his carbine unslung. It was past the time for Joe Buchan's saw-mill to commence work, but the great wheel was motionless, for the hands had not appeared.

There was a surging pushing crowd in the main street before old Tom Broadhurst's house, and a mighty clattering of tongues. 'What was it?' demanded the new-

comers, panting and breathless. 'Broadhurst has shot his mate.' 'He has cut his own throat.' 'He has struck gold in the clay floor of his kitchen.' 'No, it was his son Maurice who had come home rich.' 'Who had not come back at all.' 'Whose horse had come back without him.' At last the truth had come out; and there was the old sorrel horse in question whinnying and rubbing his neck against the familiar door of the stable, as if entreating entrance; while two haggard gray-haired men held him by either bridle and gazed blankly at his reeking sides.

'God help me,' said old Tom Broadhurst, 'it is as I feared!'

'Cheer up, mate,' said Hutton, drawing his rough straw hat down over his brow. 'There's hope yet.'

A sympathetic and encouraging murmur ran through the crowd.

'Horse ran away, likely.'

'Or been stolen.'

'Or he's swum the Wawirra an' been washed off,' suggested one Job's comforter.

'He ain't got no marks of bruising,' said another, more hopeful.

'Rider fallen off drunk, maybe,' said a bluff old sheep-farmer. 'I kin remember,' he continued, 'coming into town 'bout this hour myself, with my head in my holster, an' thinking I was a six-chambered revolver—mighty drunk I was.'

'Maurice had a good seat, he'd never be washed off.'

'Not he.'

'The horse has a weal on it's off fore-quarter,' remarked another, more observant than the rest.

'A blow from a whip maybe.'

'It would be a darned hard one.'

'Where's Chicago Bill?' said some one; 'he'll know.'

Thus invoked, a strange gaunt figure stepped out in front of the crowd. He was an extremely tall and powerful man, with the red

shirt and high boots of a miner. The shirt was thrown open, showing the sinewy throat and massive chest. His face was seamed and scarred with many a conflict, both with Nature and his brother man; yet beneath his ruffianly exterior there lay something of the quiet dignity of the gentleman. This man was a veteran gold-hunter; a real old Californian 'forty-niner, who had left the fields in disgust when private enterprise began to dwindle before the formation of huge incorporated companies with their ponderous machinery. But the red clay with the little shining points had become to him as the very breath of his nostrils, and he had come half-way round the world to seek it once again.

'Here's Chicago Bill,' he said; 'what is it?'

Bill was naturally regarded as an oracle, in virtue of his prowess and varied experience. Every eye was turned on him as Braxton, the young Irish trooper of constabulary, said, 'What do you make of the horse, Bill?'

The Yankee was in no hurry to commit himself. He surveyed the animal for some time with his shrewd little gray eye. He bent and examined the girths; then he felt the mane carefully. He stooped once more and examined the hoofs and then the quarters. His eye rested on the blue wheal already mentioned. This seemed to put him on a scent, for he gave a long low whistle, and proceeded at once to examine the hair on either side of the saddle. He saw something conclusive apparently, for, with a sidelong glance under his shaggy eyebrows at the two old men beside him, he turned and fell back among the crowd.

'Well, what d'ye think?' cried a dozen voices.

'A job for you,' said Bill, looking up at the young Irish trooper.

'Why, what is it? What's become of young Broadhurst?'

'He's done what better men has done afore. He has sunk a shaft for gold and panned out a coffin.'

'Speak out, man! what have you seen?' cried a husky voice.

'I've seen the graze of a bush-ranger's bullet on the horse's quarter, an' I've seen a drop of the rider's blood on the edge of the saddle— Here, hold the old man up, boys; don't let him drop. Give him a swig of brandy an' lead him inside. Say,' he continued, in a whisper, gripping the trooper by the wrist, 'mind, I'm in it. You an' I play this hand together. I'm dead on sich varmin. We'll do as they do in Nevada, strike while the iron is hot. Get any men you can together. Is'pose you're game to come yourself?'

'Yes, I'll come,' said young Braxton, with a quiet smile.

The American looked at him approvingly. He had learned in his wanderings that an Irishman who grows quieter when deeply stirred is a very dangerous specimen of the genus *homo*.

'Good lad!' he muttered; and the two went down the street together towards the station house, followed by half a dozen of the more resolute of the crowd.

One word before we proceed with our story, or our chronicle rather, as every word of it is based upon fact. The colonial trooper of fifteen or twenty years ago was a very different man from his representative of to-day. Not that I would imply any slur upon the courage of the latter; but for reckless dare-devilry and knight-errantry the old constabulary has never been equalled. The reason is a simple one. Men of gentle blood, younger sons and wild rakes who had outrun the constable, were sent off to Australia with some wild idea of

making their fortunes. On arriving they found Melbourne by no means the El Dorado they expected; they were unfit for any employment, their money was soon dissipated, and they unerringly gravitated into the mounted police. Thus a sort of colonial 'Maison Rouge' became formed, where the lowest private had as much pride of birth and education as his officers. They were men who might have swayed the fate of empires, yet who squandered away their lives in many a lone wild fight with native and bushranger, where nothing but a mouldering blue-ragged skeleton was left to tell the tale.

It was a glorious sunset. The whole western sky was a blaze of flame, throwing a purple tint upon the mountains, and gilding the sombre edges of the great forest which spreads between Trafalgar and the river Wawirra. It stretched out, a primeval unbroken wilderness, save at the one point where a rough track had been formed by the miners and their numerous camp-followers. This wound amid the great trunks in a zigzag direction, occasionally making a long detour to avoid some marshy hollow or especially dense clump of vegetation. Often it could be hardly discerned from the ground around save by the scattered hoof-marks and an occasional rut.

About fifteen miles from Trafalgar there stands a little knoll, well sheltered and overlooking the road. On this knoll a man was lying as the sun went down that Friday evening. He appeared to shun observation, for he had chosen that part in which the foliage was thickest; yet he seemed decidedly at his ease, as he lolled upon his back with his pipe between his teeth, and a broad hat down over his face. It was a face that it was

well to cover in the presence of so peaceful a scene—a face pitted with the scars of an immaterial small-pox. The forehead was broad and low; one eye had apparently been gouged out, leaving a ghastly cavity; the other was deep-set, cunning, and vindictive. The mouth was hard and cruel; a rough beard covered the chin. It was the cut of face which, seen in a lonely street, would instinctively make one shift the grasp of one's stick from the knob end to the ferrule—the face of a bold and unscrupulous man.

Some unpleasing thought seemed to occur to him, for he rose with a curse and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. 'A darned fine thing,' he muttered, 'that I should have to lie out like this! It was Barrett's fault the job wasn't a clean one, an' now he picks me out to get the swamp-fever. If he'd shot the horse as I did the man, we wouldn't need a watch on this side of the Wawirra. He always was a poor white-livered cuss. Well,' he continued, picking up a gun which lay in the grass behind him, 'there's no use my waiting longer; they wouldn't start during the night. Maybe the horse never got home, maybe they gave them up as drowned; anyhow it's another man's turn to-morrow, so I'll just give them five minutes and then make tracks.' He sat down on the stump of a tree as he spoke and hummed the verse of a song. A sudden thought seemed to strike him, for he plunged his hand into his pocket, and after some searching extracted a pack of playing cards wrapped in a piece of dirty brown paper. He gazed earnestly at their greasy faces for some time. Then he took a pin from his sleeve and pricked a small hole in the corner of each ace and knave. He chuckled as he shuffled them up, and replaced them in his

pocket. 'I'll have my share of the swag,' he growled. 'They're sharp, but they'll not spot that when the liquor is in them. By the Lord, here they are!'

He had sprung to his feet and was bending to the ground, holding his breath as he listened. To the unpractised ear all was as still as before—the hum of a passing insect, the chirp of a bird, the rustle of the leaves; but the bush-ranger rose with the air of a man who has satisfied himself. 'Good-bye to Bluemansdyke,' said he; 'I reckon it will be too hot to hold us for a time. That thundering idiot! he's spoilt as nice a lay as ever was, an' risked our necks into the bargain. I'll see their number an' who they are, though,' he continued; and, choosing a point where a rough thicket formed an effectual screen, he coiled himself up, and lay like some venomous snake, occasionally raising his head and peering between the trunks at the reddish streak which marked the Trafalgar-road.

There could be no question now as to the approach of a body of horsemen. By the time our friend was fairly ensconced in his hiding-place the sound of voices and the clatter of hoofs was distinctly audible, and in another moment a troop of mounted men came sweeping round the curve of the road. They were eleven all told, armed to the teeth, and evidently well on the alert. Two rode in front with rifles unslung, leisurely scanning every bush which might shelter an enemy. The main body kept about fifty yards behind them, while a solitary horseman brought up the rear. The ranger scanned them narrowly as they passed. He seemed to recognise most of them. Some were his natural enemies the troopers; the majority were miners who had volunteered to get rid of an evil which affected their

interests so closely. They were a fine bronzed set of men, with a deliberate air about them, as if they had come for a purpose and meant to attain it. As the last rider passed before his hiding-place the solitary watcher started and growled a curse in his beard. 'I know his darned face,' he said; 'it's Bill Hanker, the man who got the drop on Long Nat Smeaton in Silver City in '53; what the thunder brought him here? I must be off by the back track, though, an' let the boys know.' So saying he picked up his gun, and with a scowl after the distant party he crouched down, and passed rapidly and silently out of sight into the very thickest part of the bush.

The expedition had started from Trafalgar on the afternoon of the same day that Maurice Broadhurst's horse, foam-flecked and frightened, had galloped up to the old stable-door. Burton, the inspector of constabulary, an energetic and able man as all who knew him can testify, was in command. He had detached Braxton, the young Irishman, and Thompson, another trooper, as a vanguard. He himself rode with the main body, gray-whiskered and lean, but as straight in the back as when he and I built a shanty in '39 in what is now Burke-street, Melbourne. With him were McGilivray, Foley, and Anson of the Trafalgar force, Hartley the sheep-farmer, Murdock and Summerville, who had made their pile at the mines, and Dan Murphy, who was cleaned out when the clay of the 'Orient' turned to gravel, and had been yearning for a solid square fight ever since. Chicago Bill formed the rear-guard, and the whole party presented an appearance which, though far from military, was decidedly warlike.

They camped out that night

seventeen miles from Trafalgar, and next day pushed on as far as where the Stirling-road runs across. The third morning brought them to the northern bank of the Wawirra, which they forded. Here a council of war was held, for they were entering what they regarded as enemy's country. The bush track, though wild, was occasionally traversed both by shepherds and sportsmen. It would hardly be the home of a gang of desperate bushrangers. But beyond the Wawirra the great rugged range of the Tápu mountains towered up to the clouds, and across a wild spur of these the mining track passed up to Bluemansdyke. It was here they decided at the council that the scene of the late drama lay. The question now was what means were to be taken to attack the murderers; for that murder had been done no man doubted.

All were of one mind as to what the main line of action should be. To go for them straight, shoot as many as possible on sight, and hang the balance in Trafalgar: that was plain sailing. But how to get at them was the subject of much debate. The troopers were for pushing on at once, and trusting to Fortune to put the rangers in their way. The miners proposed rather to gain some neighbouring peak, from which a good view of the country could be obtained, and some idea gained of their whereabouts. Chicago Bill took rather a gloomy view of things. 'Nary one will we see,' said he; 'they've dusted out of the district 'fore this. They'd know the horse would go home, and likely as not they've had a watch on the road to warn them. I guess, boys, we'd best move on an' do our best.' There was some discussion, but Chicago's opinion carried the day, and the expedition pushed on in a body.

After passing the second upland station the scenery becomes more and more grand and rugged. Great peaks two and three thousand feet high rose sheer up at each side of the narrow track. The heavy wind and rain of the storm had brought down much *débris*, and the road was almost impassable in places. They were frequently compelled to dismount and to lead the horses. 'We haven't far now, boys,' said the inspector cheerily, as they struggled on; and he pointed to a great dark cleft which yawned in front of them between two almost perpendicular cliffs. 'They are there,' he said, 'or nowhere.' A little higher the road became better and their progress was more rapid. A halt was called, guns were unslung, and their pistols loosened in their belts, for the great gully of Bluemansdyke—the wildest part of the whole Tápu range—was gaping before them. But not a thing was to be seen; all was as still as the grave. The horses were picketed in a quiet little ravine, and the whole party crept on on foot. The Southern sun glared down hot and clear on the yellow bracken and banks of fern which lined the narrow winding track. Still, not a sign of life. Then came a clear low whistle from the two advanced troopers, announcing that something had been discovered, and the main body hurried up. It was a spot for deeds of blood. On one side of the road there lowered a black gnarled precipice, on the other was the sullen mouth of the rugged gully. The road took a sharp turn at this spot. Just at the angle several large boulders were scattered, lining and overlooking the track. It was at this angle that a little bed of mud and trampled red clay betokened a recent struggle. There could be

no question that they were at the scene of the murder of the two young miners. The outline of a horse could still be seen in the soft ground, and the prints of its hoofs as it kicked out in its death-agony were plainly marked. Behind one of the rocks were the tracks of several feet, and some pistol-wadding was found in a tuft of ferns. The whole tragedy lay unclosed before them. Two men, careless in the pride of their youth and their strength, had swept round that fatal curve. Then a crash, a groan, a brutal laugh, the galloping of a frightened horse, and all was over.

What was to be done now? The rocks around were explored, but nothing fresh discovered. Some six days had elapsed, and the birds were apparently flown. The party separated and hunted about among the boulders. Then the American, who could follow a trail like a bloodhound, found tracks leading towards a rugged pile of rocks on the north side of the gully. In a crevice here the remains of three horses were found. Close to them the rim of an old straw hat projected through the loose loam. Hartley, the sheepfarmer, sprang over to pick it up; he started back in the act of stooping, and said in an awestruck whisper to his friend Murphy, 'There's a head under it, Dan!' A few strokes of a spade disclosed a face familiar to most of the group—that of a poor travelling photographer well known in the colony by the *sobriquet* of 'Stooping Johnny,' who had disappeared some time before. It was now in an advanced stage of putrefaction. Close to him another body was discovered, and another beside that. In all thirteen victims of these English Thugs were lying under the shadow of the great north wall of the Bluemansdyke

gully. It was there, standing in silent awe round the remains of these poor fellows, hurried into eternity and buried like dogs, that the search-party registered a vow to sacrifice all interests and comforts for the space of one month to the single consideration of revenge. The inspector uncovered his grizzled head as he solemnly swore it, and his comrades followed his example. The bodies were then with a brief prayer consigned to a deeper grave, a rough cairn was erected over them, and the eleven men set forth upon their mission of stern justice.

Three weeks had passed—three weeks and two days. The sun was sinking over the great waste of bushland, unexplored and unknown, which stretches away from the eastern slope of the Tápu mountains. Save some eccentric sportsman or bold prospector, no colonist had ever ventured into that desolate land; yet on this autumn evening two men were standing in a little glade in the very heart of it. They were engaged tying up their horses and apparently making preparations for camping out for the night. Though haggard, unkempt, and worn, one still might recognise two of our former acquaintances—the young Irish trooper, and the American Chicago Bill.

This was the last effort of the avenging party. They had traversed the mountain gorges, they had explored every gully and ravine, and now they had split into several small bands, and, having named a trysting-place, they were scouring the country in the hope of hitting upon some trace of the murderers. Foley and Anson had remained among the hills, Murdoch and Dan Murphy were exploring towards Rathurst, Summerville and the inspector had

ascended along the Wawirra, while the others in three parties were wandering through the eastern bushland.

Both the trooper and the miner seemed dejected and weary. The one had set out with visions of glory, and hopes of a short cut to the coveted stripes which would put him above his fellows; the other had obeyed a rough wild sense of justice; and each was alike disappointed. The horses were picketed, and the men threw themselves heavily upon the ground. There was no need to light a fire; a few dampers and some rusty bacon were their whole provisions. Braxton produced them, and handed his share to his comrade. They ate their rough meal without a word. Braxton was the first to break the silence.

‘We’re playing our last card,’ he said.

‘And a darned poor one at that,’ replied his comrade.

‘Why, mate,’ he continued, ‘if we did knock up agin these all-fired varmin, ye don’t suppose you and I would go for them? I guess I’d up an’ shove for Trafalgar first.’

Braxton smiled. Chicago’s reckless courage was too well known in the colony for any words of his to throw a doubt upon it. Miners still tell how, during the first great rush in ’52, a blustering ruffian, relying upon some similar remark of the pioneer’s, had tried to establish a reputation by an unprovoked assault upon him; and the narrators then glide imperceptibly into an account of Bill’s handsome conduct towards the widow—how he had given her his week’s clean-up to start her in a drinking shanty. Braxton thought of this as he smiled at Chicago’s remarks, and glanced at the massive limbs and weather-beaten face.

‘We’d best see where we are before it grows darker,’ he said;

and rising he stacked his gun against the trunk of a blue gum-tree, and, seizing some of the creepers which hung down from it, began rapidly and silently to ascend it.

'His soul's too big for his body,' growled the American, as he watched the dark lithe figure standing out against the pale-blue evening sky.

'What d'ye see, Jack?' he shouted; for the trooper had reached the topmost branch by this time, and was taking a survey of the country.

'Bush, bush; nothing but bush,' said the voice among the leaves. 'Wait a bit, though, there's a kind of hill about three miles off away to the nor'-east. I see it above the trees right over there. Not much good to us, though,' he continued, after a pause, 'for it seems a barren stony sort of place.'

Chicago paced about at the bottom of the tree.

'He seems an almighty long time prospectin' it,' he muttered, after ten minutes had elapsed. 'Ah, here he is!' and the trooper came swinging down and landed panting just in front of him.

'Why, what's come over him? What's the matter, Jack?'

Something was the matter. That was very evident. There was a light in Braxton's blue eyes, and a flush on the pale cheek.

'Bill,' he said, putting his hand on his comrade's shoulder, 'it's about time you made tracks for the settlements.'

'What d'ye mean?' said Chicago.

'Why, I mean that the murderers are within a league of us, and that I intend going for them. There, don't be huffed, old man,' he added; 'of course I knew you were only joking. But they are there, Bill; I saw smoke on the top of that hill, and it wasn't good

honest smoke, mind you; it was dry-wood smoke, and meant to be hid. I thought it was mist at first; but no, it was smoke. I'll swear it. It could only be them; who else would camp on the summit of a desolate hill? We've got them, Bill; we have them as sure as Fate.'

'Or they've got us,' growled the American. 'But here, lad, here's my glass; run up and have a look at them.'

'It's too dark now,' said Braxton; 'we'll camp out to-night. No fear of them stirring. They're lying by there until the whole thing blows over, depend upon it; so we'll make sure of them in the morning.'

The miner looked plaintively up at the tree, and then down at his fourteen stone of solid muscle.

'I guess I must take your word for it,' he grumbled; 'but you are bushman enough to tell smoke from mist, and a dry-wood fire from an open one. We can't do anything to-night till we feel our way, so I allow we'd best water the horses an' have a good night's rest.'

Braxton seemed to be of the same mind; so after a few minutes' preparation the two men wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and lay, two little dark spots, on the great green carpet of the primeval bush.

With the first gray light of dawn, Chicago sat up and roused his comrade. A heavy mist hung over the bushland. They could hardly see the loom of the trees across the little glade. Their clothes glistened with the little shining beads of moisture. They brushed each other down, and squatted in bush fashion over their rough breakfast. The haze seemed to be lifting a little now; they could see fifty yards in every direction. The miner paced up and down in silence, ruminating over a plug of 'Barrett's twist.' Braxton

sat on a fallen tree sponging and oiling his revolver. Suddenly a single beam of sunshine played over the great blue gum. It widened and spread, and then in a moment the mist melted away, and the yellow leaves glowed like flakes of copper in the glare of the morning sun. Braxton cheerily snapped the lock of the pistol, loaded it, and replaced it in his belt. Chicago began to whistle, and stopped in the middle of his walk.

'Now, young un,' he said, 'here's the glass.'

Braxton slung it round his neck, and ascended the tree as he had done the night before. It was child's play to the trooper—a splendid climber, as I can testify; for I saw him two years later swarming up the topmost backstay of the Hector frigate in a gale of wind for a bet of a bottle of wine. He soon reached the summit, and shuffling along a naked branch two hundred feet from the ground, he gained a point where no leaves could obstruct his view. Here he sat straddle-legged; and, unslinging the glass, he proceeded to examine the hill, bush by bush and stone by stone.

An hour passed without his moving. Another had almost elapsed before he descended. His face was grave and thoughtful.

'Are they there?' was the eager query.

'Yes; they are there.'

'How many?'

'I've only seen five; but there may be more. Wait till I think it out, Bill.'

The miner gazed at him with all the reverence matter has towards mind. Thinking things out was not his strong point.

'Blamed if I can help you,' he said apologetically. 'It kinder don't come nat'ral to me to be plottin' and plannin'. Want o' eddication, likely. My father was

allowed to be the hardest-headed man in the States. Judge Jeffers let on as how the old man wanted to hand in his checks; so he down an' put his head on the line when the first engine as ran from Vermont was comin' up. They fined him a hundred dollars for upsettin' that 'ere locomotive, an' the old man got the cussedest headache as ever was.'

Braxton hardly seemed to hear this family anecdote; he was deep in thought.

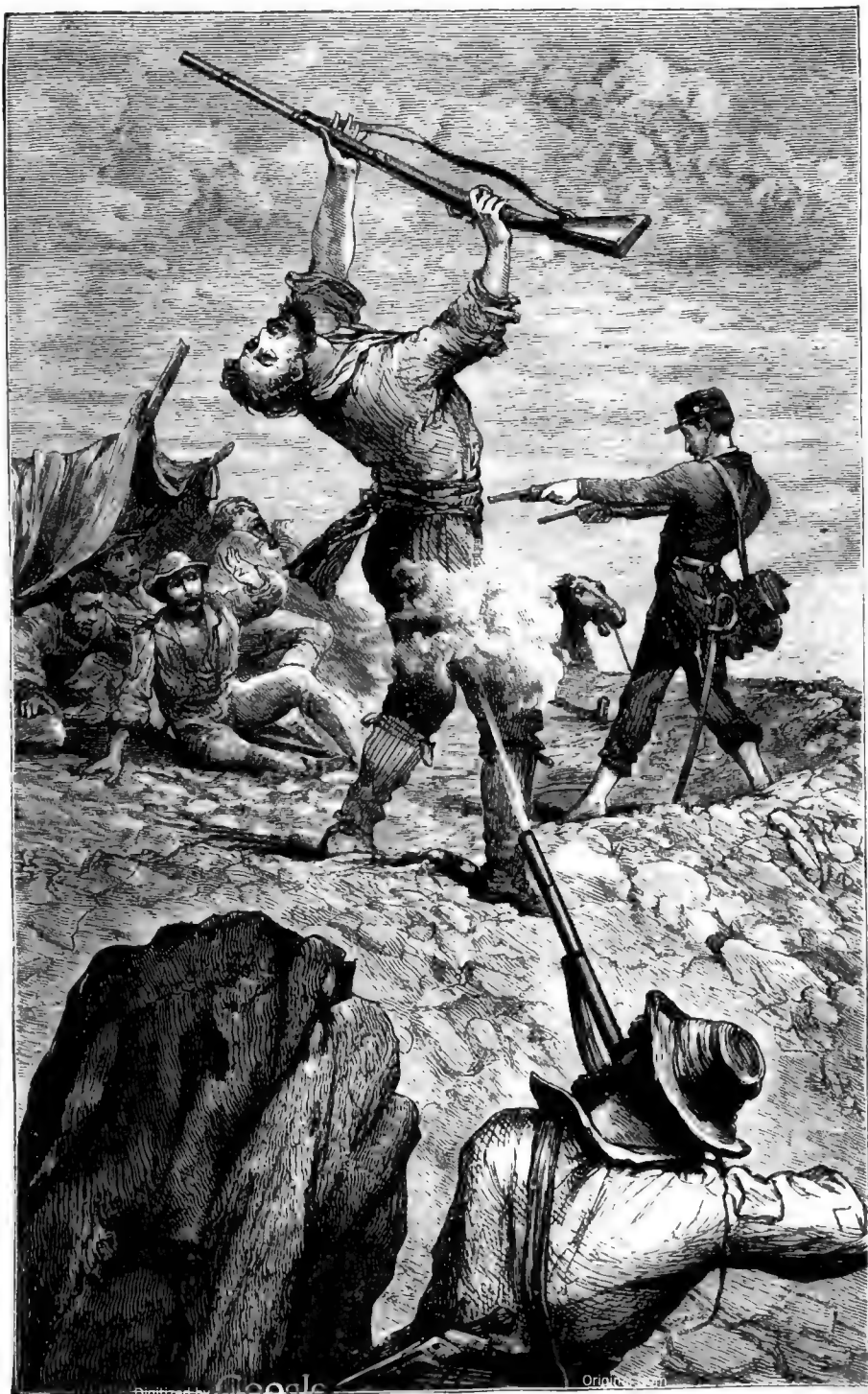
'Look here, old man,' said he, 'sit down by me on the trunk and listen to what I say. Remember that you are here as a volunteer, Bill—you've no call to come; now, I am here in the course of duty. Your name is known through the settlement; you were a marked man when I was in the nursery. Now, Bill, it's a big thing I am going to ask you. If you and I go in and take these men, it will be another feather in your cap, and in yours only. What do men know of Jack Braxton, the private of police? He'd hardly be mentioned in the matter. Now, I want to make my name this day. We'll have to secure these men by a surprise after dusk, and it will be as easy for one resolute man to do it as for two; perhaps easier, for there is less chance of detection. Bill, I want you to stay with the horses, and let me go alone.'

Chicago sprang to his feet with a snarl of indignation, and paced up and down in front of the fallen trees. Then he seemed to master himself, for he sat down again.

'They'd chaw you up, lad,' he said, putting his hand on Braxton's shoulder. 'It wouldn't wash.'

'Not they,' said the trooper. 'I'd take your pistol as well as my own, and I'd need a deal of chawing.'

'My character would be ruined,' said Bill.



CHICAGO BILL TO THE RESCUE.

'It's beyond the reach of calumny. You can afford to give me one fair chance.'

Bill buried his face in his hands, and thought a little.

'Well, lad,' he said, looking up, 'I'll look after the horses.'

Braxton wrung him by the hand. 'There are few men would have done it, Bill; you are a friend worth having. Now, we'll spend our day as best we can, old man, and lie close till evening; for I won't start till an hour after dusk; so we have plenty of time on our hands.'

The day passed slowly. The trooper lay among the mosses below the great blue gum in earnest thought. Once or twice he imagined he heard the subterranean chuckle and slap of the thigh which usually denoted amusement on the part of the miner; but on glancing up at that individual, the expression of his face was so solemn, not to say funereal, that it was evidently an illusion. They partook of their scanty dinner and supper cheerfully and with hearty appetites. The former listlessness had given place to briskness and activity now that their object was in view. Chicago blossomed out into many strange experiences and racy reminiscences of Western life. The hours passed rapidly and cheerily. The trooper produced a venerable pack of cards from his holster and proposed euchre; but their gregariousness, and the general difficulty of distinguishing the king of clubs from the ace of hearts, exercised a depressing influence upon the players. Gradually the sun went down on the great wilderness. The shadow fell on the little glade, while the distant hill was still tipped with gold; then that too became purplish, a star twinkled over the Tápu range, and night crept over the scene.

'Good-bye, old man,' said Brax-

CHRISTMAS, '87.

ton. 'I won't take my carbine; it would only be in the way. I can't thank you enough for letting me have this chance. If they wipe me out, Bill, you'll not lose sight of them, I know; and you'll say I died like a man. I've got no friends and no message, and nothing in the world but this pack of cards. Keep them, Bill; they were a fine pack in '51. If you see a smoke on the hill in the morning you'll know all's well, and you'll bring up the horses at once. If you don't, you'll ride to Fallen Pine, where we were to meet,—ride day and night, Bill,—tell Inspector Burton that you know where the rangers are, that Private Braxton is dead, and that he said he was to bring up his men, else he'd come back from the grave and lead them up himself. Do that, Bill. Good-bye'

A great quiet rested over the heart of that desolate woodland. The croak of a frog, the gurgle of a little streamlet half hidden in the long grass—no other sound. Then a wakeful jay gave a shrill chatter, another joined, and another; a bluefinch screamed; a wombat rushed past to gain its burrow. Something had disturbed them; yet all was apparently as peaceful as before. Had you been by the jay's nest, however, and peered downwards, you would have seen something gliding like a serpent through the brushwood, and caught a glimpse, perhaps, of a pale resolute face, and the glint of a pocket-compass pointing north by east.

It was a long and a weary night for Trooper Braxton. Any moment he might come on an outpost of the rangers, so every step had to be taken slowly and with care. But he was an experienced woodman, and hardly a twig snapped as he crawled along. A

D

morass barred his progress, and he was compelled to make a long detour. Then he found himself in thick brushwood, and once more had to go out of his way. It was very dark here in the depth of the forest. There was a heavy smell, and a dense steam laden with miasma rose from the ground. In the dim light he saw strange creeping things around him. A bushmaster writhed across the path in front of him, a cold dank lizard crawled over his hand as he crouched down, but the trooper thought only of the human reptiles in front, and made steadily for his goal. Once he seemed to be pursued by some animal; he heard a creaking behind him, but it ceased when he stopped and listened, so he continued his way.

It was when he reached the base of the hill which he had seen from the distance that the real difficulty of his undertaking began. It was almost conical in shape, and very steep. The sides were covered with loose stones and an occasional large boulder. One false step here would send a shower of these tell-tale fragments clattering down the hill. The trooper stripped off his high leather boots and turned up his trousers; then he began cautiously to climb, cowering down behind every boulder.

There was a little patch of light far away on the horizon, a very little gray patch, but it caused the figure of a man who was moving upon the crest of the hill to loom out dim and large. He was a sentry apparently, for he carried a gun under his arm. The top of the hill was formed by a little plateau about a hundred yards in circumference. Along the edge of this the man was pacing, occasionally stopping to peer down into the great dusky sea beneath him. From this raised edge the

plateau curved down from every side, so as to form a crater-like depression. In the centre of this hollow stood a large white tent. Several horses were picketed around it, and the ground was littered with bundles of dried grass and harness. You could see these details now from the edge of the plateau, for the gray patch in the east had become white, and was getting longer and wider. You could see the sentry's face, too, as he paced round and round. A handsome weak-minded face, with more of the fool than the devil impressed on it. He seemed cheerful, for the birds were beginning to sing, and their thousand voices rose from the bush below. He forgot the forged note, I think, and the dreary voyage, and the wild escape, and the dark gully away beyond the Tápu range, for his eye glistened, and he hummed a quaint little Yorkshire country air. He was back again in the West Riding village, and the rough boulder in front shaped itself into the hill behind which Nelly lived before he broke her heart, and he saw the ivied church that crowned it. He would have seen something else had he looked again, something which was not in his picture: a white passionless face which glared at him over the boulder, as he turned upon his heel, still singing, and unconscious that the bloodhounds of justice were close at his heels.

The trooper's time for action had come. He had reached the last boulder; nothing lay between the plateau and himself but a few loose stones. He could hear the song of the sentry dying away in the distance; he drew his regulation sword, and with his Adams in his left he rose and sprang like a tiger over the ridge and down into the hollow.

The sentry was startled from

his dream of the past by a clatter and a rattling of stones. He sprang round and cocked his gun. No wonder that he gasped, and that a change passed over his bronzed face. A painter would need a dash of ultramarine in his flesh-tints to represent it now. No wonder, I say, for that dark active figure with the bare feet and the brass buttons meant disgrace and the gallows to him. He saw him spring across to the tent; he saw the gleam of a sword, and heard a crash as the tent-pole was severed, and the canvas came down with a run upon the heads of the sleepers. And then above oaths and shouts he heard a mellow Irish voice, 'I've twelve shots in my hands. I have ye, every mother's son. Up with your arms! up, I say, before there is blood upon my soul. One move, and ye stand before the throne.' Braxton had stooped and parted the doorway of the fallen tent, and was now standing over six ruffians who occupied it. They lay as they had waken, but with their hands above their heads, for there was no resisting that quiet voice, backed up by the two black muzzles. They imagined they were surrounded and hopelessly outmatched. Not one of them dreamed that the whole attacking force stood before them. It was the sentry who first began to realise the true state of the case. There was no sound or sign of any reinforcement. He looked to see that the cap was pressed well down on the nipple, and crept towards the tent. He was a good shot, as many a keeper on Braidagarth and the Yorkshire fells could testify. He raised his gun to his shoulder. Braxton heard the click, but dared not remove his eye or his weapon from his six prisoners. The sentry looked along the sights. He knew his life depended upon that shot. There was more of the devil than

the fool in his face now. He paused a moment to make sure of his aim, and then came a crash and the thud of a falling body. Braxton was still standing over the prisoners, but the sentry's gun was unfired, and he himself was writhing on the ground with a bullet through his lungs. 'Ye see,' said Chicago, as he rose from behind a rock with his gun still smoking in his hand, 'it seemed a powerful mean thing to leave you, Jack; so I thought as I'd kinder drop around promiscus, and wade in if needed, which I was, as you can't deny. No, ye don't,' he added, as the sentry stretched out his hand to grasp his fallen gun; 'leave the wepin alone, young man; it ain't in your way as it lies there.'

'I'm a dead man!' groaned the ranger.

'Then lie quiet like a respectable corpse,' said the miner, 'an' don't go a-squirmin' towards yer gun. That's ornary uneddicated conduct.'

'Come here, Bill,' cried Braxton, 'and bring the ropes those horses are picketed with. Now,' he continued, as the American, having abstracted the sentry's gun, appeared with an armful of ropes, 'you tie these fellows up, and I'll kill any man who moves.'

'A pleasant division of labour, eh, old Blatherskite,' said Chicago, playfully tapping the one-eyed villain Maloney on the head. 'Come on; the ugliest first!' So saying, he began upon him and fastened him securely.

One after another the rangers were tied up; all except the wounded man, who was too helpless to need securing. Then Chicago went down and brought up the horses, while Braxton remained on guard; and by midday the cavalcade was in full march through the forest *en route* for Fallen Pine,

the rendezvous of the search-party. The wounded man was tied on to a horse in front, the other rangers followed on foot for safety, while the trooper and Chicago brought up the rear.

There was a sad assemblage at Fallen Pine. One by one they had dropped in, tanned with the sun, torn by briars, weakened by the poisonous miasma of the marshlands, all with the same tale of privation and failure. Summer-ville and the inspector had fallen in with blacks above the upper ford, and had barely escaped with their lives. Troopers Foley and Anson were well, though somewhat gaunt from privation. Hartley had lost his horse from the bite of a bushmaster. Murdoch and Murphy had scoured the bush as far as Rathurst, but without success. All were dejected and weary. They only waited the arrival of two of their number to set out on their return to Trafalgar.

It was midday, and the sun was beating down with a pitiless glare on the little clearing. The men were lying about on the shady side of the trunks, some smoking, some with their hats over their faces, and half-asleep. The horses were tethered here and there, looking as listless as their masters. Only the inspector's old charger seemed superior to the weather—a shrewd *blasé* old horse, that had seen the world, and was nearly as deeply versed in woodcraft as his master. As Chicago said, 'Short of climbin' a tree, there weren't nothin' that horse couldn't do; an' it would make a darned good try at that if it was pushed.' Old 'Sawback' seemed ill at ease this afternoon. Twice he had pricked up his ears, and once he had raised his head as if to neigh, but paused before committing himself. The inspector looked at him curiously and

put his meerscham back into its case. Meerschams were always a weakness of poor Jim Burton's. 'Demme it, sir,' I have heard him say, 'a gentleman is known by his pipe. When he comes down in the world his pipe has most vitality.' He put the case inside his uniform and went over to the horse. The ears were still twitching.

'He hears something,' said the inspector. 'By Jove, so do I! Here, boys, jump up; there's a body of men coming! Every man sprang to his horse's head. 'I hear hoofs, and I hear the tramp of men on foot. They must be a large party. They're heading straight for us. Get under cover, boys, and have your guns loose.' The men wheeled right and left, and in a very few moments the glade was deserted. Only the brown barrel of a gun here and there among the long grass and the ferns showed where they were crouching. 'Steady, boys!' said Burton; 'if they are enemies, don't fire till I give the word. Then one by one aim low, and let the smoke clear. Rangers, by Jove!' he added, as a horseman broke into the clearing some way down, with his head hanging down over his horse's neck. 'More,' he growled, as several men emerged from the bush at the same point. 'By the living powers, they are taken! I see the ropes. Hurrah!' And next moment Braxton and Chicago were mobbed by nine shouting dancing men, who pulled them and tugged at them, and slapped them on the back, and dragged them about in such a way, that Maloney whispered with a scowl,

'If we'd had the grit to do as much, we'd have been free men this day!'

And now our story is nearly done. We have chronicled a fact

which we think is worthy of a wider circulation than the colonial drinking-bar and the sheep-farmer's fireside, for Trooper Braxton and his capture of the Blue-mansdyke murderers have long been household words among our brothers in the England of the Southern seas.

We need not detail that joyful ride to Trafalgar, nor the welcome, nor the attempt at lynching; nor how Maloney, the arch criminal, turned Queen's evidence, and so writhed away from the gallows. All that may be read in the colonial press, more graphically than I can tell it. My friend Jack Braxton is an officer now, as his father was before him, and still in the Trafalgar force. Bill I saw last in '61, when he came

over to London in charge of the bark of the Wellingtonia for the International Exhibition. He is laying on flesh, I fear, since he took to sheep-farming; for he was barely brought up by seventeen stone, and his fighting weight used to be fourteen; but he looks well and hearty. Maloney was lynched in Placerville—at least, so I heard. I had a letter last mail from the old inspector; he has left the police, and has a farm at Rathurst. I think, stout-hearted as he is, he must give a little bit of a shudder when he rides down to Trafalgar for the Thursday market, and comes round that sharp turn of the road where the boulders lie, and the furze looks so yellow against the red clay.

A YULE-TIDE PARODY.

WHEN other wits and other bards
 Their tales at Christmas tell,
 Or praise on cheap and coloured cards
 The time they love so well;
 Secure from scorn and ridicule
 I hope my verse may be,
 If I can still remember Yule,
 And Yule remember *me*.

The days are dark, the days are drear,
 When dull December dies;
 But, while we mourn an ended year,
 Another's star will rise.
 I hail the season formed by rule
 For merriment and glee;
 So let me still remember Yule,
 And Yule remember *me*.

The rich plum-pudding I enjoy,
 I greet the pie of mince;
 And, loving both while yet a boy,
 Have loved them ever since.
 More dull were I than any mule
 That eyes did ever see,
 If I should not remember Yule,
 And Yule remember *me*.



THAT LITTLE SQUARE BOX.

'ALL aboard?' said the captain.

'All aboard, sir!' said the mate.

'Then stand by to let her go.'

It was nine o'clock on a Wednesday morning. The good ship *Spartan* was lying off Boston Quay with her cargo under hatches, her passengers shipped, and everything prepared for a start. The warning whistle had been sounded twice, the final bell had been rung. Her bowsprit was turned towards England, and the hiss of escaping steam showed that all was ready for her run of three thousand miles. She strained at the warps that held her like a greyhound at its leash.

I have the misfortune to be a very nervous man. A sedentary literary life has helped to increase the morbid love of solitude which, even in my boyhood, was one of my distinguishing characteristics. As I stood upon the quarter-deck of the Transatlantic steamer, I bitterly cursed the necessity which drove me back to the land of my forefathers. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of the cordage, the farewells of my fellow-passengers, and the cheers of the mob, each and all jarred upon my sensitive nature. I felt sad too. An indescribable feeling, as of some impending calamity, seemed to haunt me. The sea was calm, and the breeze light. There was nothing to disturb the equanimity of the most confirmed of landmen, yet I felt as if I stood upon the verge of a great though indefinable danger. I have noticed

that such presentiments occur often in men of my peculiar temperament, and that they are not uncommonly fulfilled. There is a theory that it arises from a species of second-sight, a subtle spiritual communication with the future. I well remember that Herr Raumer, the eminent spiritualist, remarked on one occasion that I was the most sensitive subject as regards supernatural phenomena that he had ever encountered in the whole of his wide experience. Be that as it may, I certainly felt far from happy as I threaded my way among the weeping, cheering groups which dotted the white decks of the good ship *Spartan*. Had I known the experience which awaited me in the course of the next twelve hours I would even then at the last moment have sprung upon the shore, and made my escape from the accursed vessel.

'Time's up!' said the captain, closing his chronometer with a snap, and replacing it in his pocket. 'Time's up!' said the mate. There was a last wail from the whistle, a rush of friends and relatives upon the land. One warp was loosened, the gangway was being pushed away, when there was a shout from the bridge, and two men appeared, running rapidly down the quay. They were waving their hands and making frantic gestures, apparently with the intention of stopping the ship. 'Look sharp!' shouted the crowd. 'Hold hard!' cried the captain. 'Ease her! stop her! Up with

the gangway!' and the two men sprang aboard just as the second warp parted, and a convulsive throb of the engine shot us clear of the shore. There was a cheer from the deck, another from the quay, a mighty fluttering of handkerchiefs, and the great vessel ploughed its way out of the harbour, and steamed grandly away across the placid bay.

We were fairly started upon our fortnight's voyage. There was a general dive among the passengers in quest of berths and luggage, while a popping of corks in the saloon proved that more than one bereaved traveller was adopting artificial means for drowning the pangs of separation. I glanced round the deck and took a running inventory of my *compagnons de voyage*. They presented the usual types met with upon these occasions. There was no striking face among them. I speak as a connoisseur, for faces are a specialty of mine. I pounce upon a characteristic feature as a botanist does on a flower, and bear it away with me to analyse at my leisure, and classify and label it in my little anthropological museum. There was nothing worthy of me here. Twenty types of young America going to 'Yurup,' a few respectable middle-aged couples as an antidote, a sprinkling of clergymen and professional men, young ladies, bagmen, British exclusives, and all the *olla podrida* of an ocean-going steamer. I turned away from them and gazed back at the receding shores of America, and, as a cloud of remembrances rose before me, my heart warmed towards the land of my adoption. A pile of portmanteaus and luggage chanced to be lying on one side of the deck, awaiting their turn to be taken below. With my usual love for solitude I walked behind these, and sitting

on a coil of rope between them and the vessel's side, I indulged in a melancholy reverie.

I was aroused from this by a whisper behind me. 'Here's a quiet place,' said the voice. 'Sit down, and we can talk it over in safety.'

Glancing through a chink between two colossal chests, I saw that the passengers who had joined us at the last moment were standing at the other side of the pile. They had evidently failed to see me as I crouched in the shadow of the boxes. The one who had spoken was a tall and very thin man with a blue-black beard and a colourless face. His manner was nervous and excited. His companion was a short plethoric little fellow, with a brisk and resolute air. He had a cigar in his mouth, and a large ulster slung over his left arm. They both glanced round uneasily, as if to ascertain whether they were alone. 'This is just the place,' I heard the other say. They sat down on a bale of goods with their backs turned towards me, and I found myself, much against my will, playing the unpleasant part of eavesdropper to their conversation.

'Well, Muller,' said the taller of the two, 'we've got it aboard right enough.'

'Yes,' assented the man whom he had addressed as Muller, 'it's safe aboard.'

'It was rather a near go.'

'It was that, Flannigan.'

'It wouldn't have done to have missed the ship.'

'No, it would have put our plans out.'

'Ruined them entirely,' said the little man, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes.

'I've got it here,' he said at last.

'Let me see it.'

'Is no one looking?'

'No, they are nearly all below.'

'We can't be too careful where so much is at stake,' said Muller. as he uncoiled the ulster which hung over his arm, and disclosed a dark object which he laid upon the deck. One glance at it was enough to cause me to spring to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Luckily they were so engrossed in the matter on hand that neither of them observed me. Had they turned their heads they would infallibly have seen my pale face glaring at them over the pile of boxes.

From the first moment of their conversation a horrible misgiving had come over me. It seemed more than confirmed as I gazed at what lay before me. It was a little square box made of some dark wood, and ribbed with brass. I suppose it was about the size of a cubic foot. It reminded me of a pistol-case, only it was decidedly higher. There was an appendage to it, however, on which my eyes were riveted, and which suggested the pistol itself rather than its receptacle. This was a trigger-like arrangement upon the lid, to which a coil of string was attached. Beside this trigger there was a small square aperture through the wood. The tall man, Flannigan, as his companion called him, applied his eye to this and peered in for several minutes with an expression of intense anxiety upon his face.

'It seems right enough,' he said at last.

'I tried not to shake it,' said his companion.

'Such delicate things need delicate treatment. Put in some of the needful, Muller.'

The shorter man fumbled in his pocket for some time, and then produced a small paper packet. He opened this, and took out of it half a handful of whitish gra-

nules, which he poured down through the hole. A curious clicking noise followed from the inside of the box, and both the men smiled in a satisfied way.

'Nothing much wrong there,' said Flannigan.

'Right as a trivet,' answered his companion.

'Look out! here's some one coming. Take it down to our berth. It wouldn't do to have any one suspecting what our game is, or, worse still, have them fumbling with it, and letting it off by mistake.'

'Well, it would come to the same, whoever let it off,' said Muller.

'They'd be rather astonished if they pulled the trigger,' said the taller, with a sinister laugh. 'Ha, ha! fancy their faces! It's not a bad bit of workmanship, I flatter myself.'

'No,' said Muller. 'I hear it is your own design, every bit of it, isn't it?'

'Yes, the spring and the sliding shutter are my own.'

'We should take out a patent.'

And the two men laughed again with a cold harsh laugh, as they took up the little brass-bound package, and concealed it in Muller's voluminous overcoat.

'Come down, and we'll stow it in our berth,' said Flannigan. 'We won't need it until to-night, and it will be safe there.'

His companion assented, and the two went arm-in-arm along the deck and disappeared down the hatchway, bearing the mysterious little box away with them. The last words I heard were a muttered injunction from Flannigan to carry it carefully, and avoid knocking it against the bulwarks.

How long I remained sitting on that coil of rope I shall never know. The horror of the conversation I had just overheard was

aggravated by the first sinking qualms of sea-sickness. The long roll of the Atlantic was beginning to assert itself over both ship and passengers. I felt prostrated in mind and in body, and fell into a state of collapse, from which I was finally aroused by the hearty voice of our worthy quartermaster.

'Do you mind moving out of that, sir?' he said. 'We want to get this lumber cleared off the deck.'

His bluff manner and ruddy healthy face seemed to be a positive insult to me in my present condition. Had I been a courageous or a muscular man I could have struck him. As it was, I treated the honest sailor to a melodramatic scowl which seemed to cause him no small astonishment, and strode past him to the other side of the deck. Solitude was what I wanted—solitude in which I could brood over the frightful crime which was being hatched before my very eyes. One of the quarter boats was hanging rather low down upon the davits. An idea struck me, and, climbing on the bulwarks, I stepped into the empty boat and lay down in the bottom of it. Stretched on my back, with nothing but the blue sky above me, and an occasional view of the mizen as the vessel rolled, I was at least alone with my sickness and my thoughts.

I tried to recall the words which had been spoken in the terrible dialogue I had overheard. Would they admit of any construction but the one which stared me in the face? My reason forced me to confess that they would not. I endeavoured to array the various facts which formed the chain of circumstantial evidence, and to find a flaw in it; but no, not a link was missing. There was the strange

way in which our passengers had come aboard, enabling them to evade any examination of their luggage. The very name of 'Flannigan' smacked of Fenianism, while 'Muller' suggested nothing but Socialism and murder. Then their mysterious manner; their remark that their plans would have been ruined had they missed the ship; their fear of being observed; last, but not least, the clenching evidence in the production of the little square box with the trigger, and their grim joke about the face of the man who should let it off by mistake,—could these facts lead to any conclusion other than that they were the desperate emissaries of some body, political or otherwise, and intended to sacrifice themselves, their fellow-passengers, and the ship, in one great holocaust? The whitish granules which I had seen one of them pour into the box formed no doubt a fuse or train for exploding it. I had myself heard a sound come from it which might have emanated from some delicate piece of machinery. But what did they mean by their allusion to to-night? Could it be that they contemplated putting their horrible design into execution on the very first evening of our voyage? The mere thought of it sent a cold shudder over me, and made me for a moment superior even to the agonies of sea-sickness.

I have remarked that I am a physical coward. I am a moral one also. It is seldom that the two defects are united to such a degree in the one character. I have known many men who were most sensitive to bodily danger, and yet were distinguished for the independence and strength of their minds. In my own case, however, I regret to say that my quiet and retiring habits had

fostered a nervous dread of doing anything remarkable or making myself conspicuous, which exceeded, if possible, my fear of personal peril. An ordinary mortal placed under the circumstances in which I now found myself would have gone at once to the captain, confessed his fears, and put the matter into his hands. To me, however, constituted as I am, the idea was most repugnant. The thought of becoming the observed of all observers, cross-questioned by a stranger, and confronted with two desperate conspirators in the character of a denouncer, was hateful to me. Might it not by some remote possibility prove that I was mistaken? What would be my feelings if there should turn out to be no grounds for my accusation? No, I would procrastinate; I would keep my eye on the two desperadoes and dog them at every turn. Anything was better than the possibility of being wrong.

Then it struck me that even at that moment some new phase of the conspiracy might be developing itself. The nervous excitement seemed to have driven away my incipient attack of sickness, for I was able to stand up and lower myself from the boat without experiencing any return of it. I staggered along the deck with the intention of descending into the cabin and finding how my acquaintances of the morning were occupying themselves. Just as I had my hand on the companion-rail, I was astonished by receiving a hearty slap on the back, which nearly shot me down the steps with more haste than dignity.

'Is that you, Hammond?' said a voice which I seemed to recognise.

'God bless me,' I said as I turned round, 'it can't be Dick Merton! Why, how are you, old man?'

This was an unexpected piece of luck in the midst of my perplexities. Dick was just the man I wanted; kindly and shrewd in his nature, and prompt in his actions, I should have no difficulty in telling him my suspicions, and could rely upon his sound sense to point out the best course to pursue. Since I was a little lad in the second form at Harrow, Dick had been my adviser and protector. He saw at a glance that something had gone wrong with me.

'Hullo!' he said, in his kindly way, 'what's put you about, Hammond? You look as white as a sheet. *Mal de mer*, eh?'

'No, not that altogether,' said I. 'Walk up and down with me, Dick; I want to speak to you. Give me your arm.'

Supporting myself on Dick's stalwart frame, I tottered along by his side; but it was some time before I could muster resolution to speak.

'Have a cigar,' said he, breaking the silence.

'No, thanks,' said I. 'Dick, we shall be all corpses to-night.'

'That's no reason against your having a cigar now,' said Dick, in his cool way, but looking hard at me from under his shaggy eyebrows as he spoke. He evidently thought that my intellect was a little gone.

'No,' I continued, 'it's no laughing matter; and I speak in sober earnest, I assure you. I have discovered an infamous conspiracy, Dick, to destroy this ship and every soul that is in her;' and I then proceeded systematically, and in order, to lay before him the chain of evidence which I had collected. 'There, Dick,' I said, as I concluded, 'what do you think of that? and, above all, what am I to do?'

To my astonishment he burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

'I'd be frightened,' he said, 'if any fellow but you had told me as much. You always had a way, Hammond, of discovering mares' nests. I like to see the old traits breaking out again. Do you remember at school how you swore there was a ghost in the long room, and how it turned out to be your own reflection in the mirror? Why, man,' he continued, 'what object would any one have in destroying this ship? We have no great political guns aboard. On the contrary, the majority of the passengers are Americans. Besides, in this sober nineteenth century, the most wholesale murderers stop at including themselves among their victims. Depend upon it, you have misunderstood them, and have mistaken a photographic camera, or something equally innocent, for an infernal machine.'

'Nothing of the sort, sir,' said I rather touchily. 'You will learn to your cost, I fear, that I have neither exaggerated nor misinterpreted a word. As to the box, I have certainly never before seen one like it. It contained delicate machinery; of that I am convinced, from the way in which the men handled it and spoke of it.'

'You'd make out every packet of perishable goods to be a torpedo,' said Dick, 'if that is to be your only test.'

'The man's name was Flannigan,' I continued.

'I don't think that would go very far in a court of law,' said Dick; 'but come, I have finished my cigar. Suppose we go down together and split a bottle of claret. You can point out these two Orsinis to me if they are still in the cabin.'

'All right,' I answered; 'I am determined not to lose sight of them all day. Don't look hard at

them, though; for I don't want them to think that they are being watched.'

'Trust me,' said Dick; 'I'll look as unconscious and guileless as a lamb;' and with that we passed down the companion and into the saloon.

A good many passengers were scattered about the great central table, some wrestling with refractory carpet-bags and rug-straps, some having their luncheon, and a few reading and otherwise amusing themselves. The objects of our quest were not there. We passed down the room and peered into every berth; but there was no sign of them. 'Heavens!' thought I, 'perhaps at this very moment they are beneath our feet, in the hold or engine-room, preparing their diabolical contrivance!' It was better to know the worst than to remain in such suspense.

'Steward,' said Dick, 'are there any other gentlemen about?'

'There's two in the smoking-room, sir,' answered the steward.

The smoking-room was a little snugger, luxuriously fitted up, and adjoining the pantry. We pushed the door open and entered. A sigh of relief escaped from my bosom. The very first object on which my eye rested was the cadaverous face of Flannigan, with its hard-set mouth and unwinking eye. His companion sat opposite to him. They were both drinking, and a pile of cards lay upon the table. They were engaged in playing as we entered. I nudged Dick to show him that we had found our quarry, and we sat down beside them with as unconcerned an air as possible. The two conspirators seemed to take little notice of our presence. I watched them both narrowly. The game at which they were playing was 'Napoleon.' Both

were adepts at it; and I could not help admiring the consummate nerve of men who, with such a secret at their hearts, could devote their minds to the manipulating of a long suit or the finessing of a queen. Money changed hands rapidly; but the run of luck seemed to be all against the taller of the two players. At last he threw down his cards on the table with an oath, and refused to go on.

'No, I'm hanged if I do!' he said; 'I haven't had more than two of a suit for five hands.'

'Never mind,' said his comrade, as he gathered up his winnings; 'a few dollars one way or the other won't go very far after to-night's work.'

I was astonished at the rascal's audacity, but took care to keep my eyes fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, and drank my wine in as unconscious a manner as possible. I felt that Flannigan was looking towards me with his wolfish eyes to see if I had noticed the allusion. He whispered something to his companion which I failed to catch. It was a caution, I suppose, for the other answered rather angrily,

'Nonsense! Why shouldn't I say what I like? Over-caution is just what would ruin us.'

'I believe you want it not to come off,' said Flannigan.

'You believe nothing of the sort,' said the other, speaking rapidly and loudly. 'You know as well as I do that when I play for a stake I like to win it. But I won't have my words criticised and cut short by you or any other man; I have as much interest in our success as you have—more, I hope.'

He was quite hot about it, and puffed furiously at his cigar for some minutes. The eyes of the other ruffian wandered alternately

from Dick Merton to myself. I knew that I was in the presence of a desperate man, that a quiver of my lip might be the signal for him to plunge a weapon into my heart; but I betrayed more self-command than I should have given myself credit for under such trying circumstances. As to Dick, he was as immovable and apparently as unconscious as the Egyptian Sphinx.

There was silence for some time in the smoking-room, broken only by the crisp rattle of the cards, as the man Muller shuffled them up before replacing them in his pocket. He still seemed to be somewhat flushed and irritable. Throwing the end of his cigar into the spittoon, he glanced defiantly at his companion, and turned towards me.

'Can you tell me, sir,' he said, 'when this ship will be heard of again?'

They were both looking at me; but though my face may have turned a trifle paler, my voice was as steady as ever as I answered,

'I presume, sir, that it will be heard of first when it enters Queenstown Harbour.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed the angry little man, 'I knew you would say that. Don't you kick me under the table, Flannigan, I won't stand it. I know what I am doing. You are wrong, sir,' he continued, turning to me, 'utterly wrong.'

'Some passing ship, perhaps,' suggested Dick.

'No, nor that either.'

'The weather is fine,' I said; 'why should we not be heard of at our destination?'

'I didn't say we shouldn't be heard of at our destination. No doubt we shall in the course of time, but that is not where we shall be heard of first.'

'Where then?' asked Dick.

'That you will never know. Suffice it that a rapid and mysterious agency will signal our whereabouts, and that before the day is out. Ha, ha!' and he chuckled once again.

'Come on deck!' growled his comrade; 'you have drunk too much of that confounded brandy-and-water. It has loosened your tongue. Come away!' and taking him by the arm he half led him, half forced him out of the smoking-room, and we heard them stumbling up the companion together, and on to the deck.

'Well, what do you think now?' I gasped, as I turned towards Dick. He was as imperturbable as ever.

'Think!' he said, 'why, I think what his companion thinks, that we have been listening to the ravings of a half-drunken man. The fellow stunk of brandy.'

'Nonsense, Dick! you saw how the other tried to stop his tongue.'

'Of course he did. He didn't want his friend to make a fool of himself before strangers. Maybe the short one is a lunatic, and the other his private keeper. It's quite possible.'

'O Dick, Dick,' I cried, 'how can you be so blind! Don't you see that every word confirmed our previous suspicion?'

'Humbug, man!' said Dick; 'you're working yourself into a state of nervous excitement. Why, what the devil do *you* make of all that nonsense about a mysterious agent which would signal our whereabouts?'

'I'll tell you what he meant, Dick,' I said, bending forward and grasping my friend's arm. 'He meant a sudden glare and a flash seen far out at sea by some lonely fisherman off the American coast. That's what he meant.'

'I didn't think you were such

a fool, Hammond,' said Dick Merton testily. 'If you try to fix a literal meaning on the twaddle that every drunken man talks, you will come to some queer conclusions. Let us follow their example, and go on deck. You need fresh air, I think. Depend upon it, your liver is out of order. A sea-voyage will do you a world of good.'

'If ever I see the end of this one,' I groaned, 'I'll promise never to venture on another. They are laying the cloth, so it's hardly worth while my going up. I'll stay below and finish my smoke.'

'I hope dinner will find you in a more pleasant state of mind,' said Dick; and he went out, leaving me to my thoughts until the clang of the great gong summoned us to the saloon.

My appetite, I need hardly say, had not been improved by the incidents which had occurred during the day. I sat down, however, mechanically at the table, and listened to the talk which was going on around me. There were nearly a hundred first-class passengers, and as the wine began to circulate, their voices combined with the clash of the dishes to form a perfect Babel. I found myself seated between a very stout and nervous old lady and a prim little clergyman; and as neither made any advances I retired into my shell, and spent my time in observing the appearance of my fellow-voyagers. I could see Dick in the dim distance dividing his attentions between a jointless fowl in front of him and a self-possessed young lady at his side. Captain Dowie was doing the honours at my end, while the surgeon of the vessel was seated at the other. I was glad to notice that Flannigan was placed almost opposite to me. As long as I had

him before my eyes I knew that, for the time at least, we were safe. He was sitting with what was meant to be a sociable smile on his grim face. It did not escape me that he drank largely of wine—so largely that even before the desert appeared his voice had become decidedly husky. His friend Muller was seated a few places lower down. He ate little, and appeared to be nervous and restless.

‘Now, ladies,’ said our genial captain, ‘I trust that you will consider yourselves at home aboard my vessel. I have no fears for the gentlemen. A bottle of champagne, steward. Here’s to a fresh breeze and a quick passage! I trust our friends in America will hear of our safe arrival in twelve days, or a fortnight at the very latest.’

I looked up. Quick as was the glance which passed between Flannigan and his confederate, I was able to intercept it. There was an evil smile upon the former’s thin lips.

The conversation rippled on. Politics, the sea, amusements, religion, each was in turn discussed. I remained a silent though an interested listener. It struck me that no harm could be done by introducing the subject which was ever in my mind. It could be managed in an off-hand way, and would at least have the effect of turning the captain’s thoughts in that direction. I could watch, too, what effect it would have upon the faces of the conspirators.

There was a sudden lull in the conversation. The ordinary subjects of interest appeared to be exhausted. The opportunity was a favourable one.

‘May I ask, captain,’ I said, bending forward and speaking very distinctly, ‘what you think of Fenian manifestoes?’

The captain’s ruddy face became

a shade darker from honest indignation.

‘They are poor cowardly things,’ he said, ‘as silly as they are wicked.’

‘The impotent threats of a set of anonymous scoundrels,’ said a pompous-looking old gentleman beside him.

‘O captain!’ said the fat lady at my side, ‘you don’t really think they would blow up a ship?’

‘I have no doubt they would if they could. But I am very sure they will never blow up mine.’

‘May I ask what precautions are taken against them?’ said an elderly man at the end of the table.

‘All goods sent aboard the ship are strictly examined,’ said Captain Dowie.

‘But suppose a man brought explosives aboard with him?’ said I.

‘They are too cowardly to risk their own lives in that way.’

During this conversation Flannigan had not betrayed the slightest interest in what was going on. He raised his head now and looked at the captain.

‘Don’t you think you are rather underrating them?’ he said. ‘Every secret society has produced desperate men—why shouldn’t the Fenians have them too? Many men think it a privilege to die in the service of a cause which seems right in their eyes, though others may think it wrong.’

‘Indiscriminate murder cannot be right in anybody’s eyes,’ said the little clergyman.

‘The bombardment of Paris was nothing else,’ said Flannigan; ‘yet the whole civilised world agreed to look on with folded arms, and change the ugly word “murder” into the more euphonious one of “war.” It seemed right enough to German eyes; why

shouldn't dynamite seem so to the Fenian ?

'At any rate their empty vapourings have led to nothing as yet,' said the captain.

'Excuse me,' returned Flannigan, 'but is there not some room for doubt yet as to the fate of the Dotterel? I have met men in America who asserted from their own personal knowledge that there was a coal torpedo aboard that vessel.'

'Then they lied,' said the captain. 'It was proved conclusively at the court-martial to have arisen from an explosion of coal-gas—but we had better change the subject, or we may cause the ladies to have a restless night ;' and the conversation once more drifted back into its original channel.

During this little discussion Flannigan had argued his point with a gentlemanly deference and a quiet power for which I had not given him credit. I could not help admiring a man who, on the eve of a desperate enterprise, could courteously argue upon a point which must touch him so nearly. He had, as I have already mentioned, partaken of a considerable quantity of wine ; but though there was a slight flush upon his pale cheek, his manner was as reserved as ever. He did not join in the conversation again, but seemed to be lost in thought.

A whirl of conflicting ideas was battling in my own mind. What was I to do? Should I stand up now and denounce them before both passengers and captain? Should I demand a few minutes' conversation with the latter in his own cabin, and reveal it all? For an instant I was half resolved to do it, but then the old constitutional timidity came back with redoubled force. After all there might be some mistake. Dick had heard the

evidence and had refused to believe in it. I determined to let things go on their course. A strange reckless feeling came over me. Why should I help men who were blind to their own danger? Surely it was the duty of the officers to protect us, not ours to give warning to them. I drank off a couple of glasses of wine, and staggered upon deck with the determination of keeping my secret locked in my own bosom.

It was a glorious evening. Even in my excited state of mind I could not help leaning against the bulwarks and enjoying the refreshing breeze. Away to the westward a solitary sail stood out as a dark speck against the great sheet of flame left by the setting sun. I shuddered as I looked at it. It seemed like a sea of blood. A single star was twinkling faintly above our main-mast, but a thousand seemed to gleam in the water below with every stroke of our propeller. The only blot in the fair scene was the great trail of smoke which stretched away behind us like a black slash upon a crimson curtain. It seemed hard to believe that the great peace which hung over all Nature could be marred by a poor miserable mortal.

'After all,' I thought, as I gazed into the blue depths beneath me, 'if the worst comes to the worst, it is better to die here than to linger in agony upon a sick-bed on land.' A man's life seems a very paltry thing amid the great forces of Nature. All my philosophy could not prevent my shuddering, however, when I turned my head and saw two shadowy figures at the other side of the deck, which I had no difficulty in recognising. They seemed to be conversing earnestly, but I had no opportunity of overhearing what was said ; so I contented my-

self with pacing up and down, and keeping a vigilant watch upon their movements.

It was a relief to me when Dick came on deck. Even an incredulous confidant is better than none at all.

'Well, old man,' he said, giving me a facetious dig in the ribs, 'we've not been blown up yet.'

'No, not yet,' said I; 'but that's no proof that we are not going to be.'

'Nonsense, man!' said Dick; 'I can't conceive what has put this extraordinary idea into your head. I have been talking to one of your supposed assassins, and he seems a pleasant fellow enough; quite a sporting character, I should think, from the way he speaks.'

'Dick,' I said, 'I am as certain that those men have an infernal machine, and that we are on the verge of eternity, as if I saw them putting the match to the fuse.'

'Well, if you really think so,' said Dick, half awed for the moment by the earnestness of my manner, 'it is your duty to let the captain know of your suspicions.'

'You are right,' I said; 'I will. My absurd timidity has prevented my doing so sooner. I believe our lives can only be saved by laying the whole matter before him.'

'Well, go and do it now,' said Dick; 'but for goodness' sake don't mix me up in the matter.'

'I'll speak to him when he comes off the bridge,' I answered; 'and in the mean time I don't mean to lose sight of them.'

'Let me know of the result,' said my companion; and with a nod he strolled away in search, I fancy, of his partner at the dinner-table.

Left to myself, I bethought me of my retreat of the morning, and climbing on the bulwark

I mounted into the quarter-boat, and lay down there. In it I could reconsider my course of action, and by raising my head I was able at any time to get a view of my disagreeable neighbours.

An hour passed, and the captain was still on the bridge. He was talking to one of the passengers, a retired naval officer, and the two were deep in debate concerning some abstruse point in navigation. I could see the red tips of their cigars from where I lay. It was dark now, so dark that I could hardly make out the figures of Flannigan and his accomplice. They were still standing in the position which they had taken up after dinner. A few of the passengers were scattered about the deck, but many had gone below. A strange stillness seemed to pervade the air. The voices of the watch and the rattle of the wheel were the only sounds which broke the silence.

Another half-hour passed. The captain was still upon the bridge. It seemed as if he would never come down. My nerves were in a state of unnatural tension, so much so that the sound of two steps upon the deck made me start up in a quiver of excitement. I peered over the side of the boat, and saw that our suspicious passengers had crossed from the other side, and were standing almost directly beneath me. The light of a binnacle fell full upon the ghastly face of the ruffian Flannigan. Even in that short glance I saw that Muller had the ulster, whose use I knew so well, slung loosely over his arm. I sank back with a groan. It seemed that my fatal procrastination had sacrificed two hundred innocent lives.

I had read of the fiendish vengeance which awaited a spy. I knew that men with their lives

in their hands would stick at nothing. All I could do was to cower at the bottom of the boat and listen silently to their whispered talk below.

'This place will do,' said a voice.

'Yes, the leeward side is best.'

'I wonder if the trigger will act?'

'I am sure it will.'

'We were to let it off at ten, were we not?'

'Yes, at ten sharp. We have eight minutes yet.' There was a pause. Then the voice began again,

'They'll hear the drop of the trigger, won't they?'

'It doesn't matter. It will be too late for any one to prevent it's going off.'

'That's true. There will be some excitement among those we have left behind, won't there?'

'Rather! How long do you reckon it will be before they hear of us?'

'The first news will get in in about twenty-four hours.'

'That will be mine.'

'No, mine.'

'Ha, ha! we'll settle that.'

There was a pause here. Then I heard Muller's voice in a ghastly whisper, 'There's only five minutes more.'

How slowly the moments seemed to pass! I could count them by the throbbing of my heart.

'It'll make a sensation on land,' said a voice.

'Yes, it will make a noise in the newspapers.'

I raised my head and peered over the side of the boat. There seemed no hope, no help. Death stared me in the face, whether I did or did not give the alarm. The captain had at last left the bridge. The deck was deserted, save for those two dark figures crouching in the shadow of the boat.

Flannigan had a watch lying open in his hand.

'Three minutes more,' he said. 'Put it down upon the deck.'

'No, put it here on the bulwarks.'

It was the little square box. I knew by the sound that they had placed it near the davit, and almost exactly under my head.

I looked over again. Flannigan was pouring something out of a paper into his hand. It was white and granular—the same that I had seen him use in the morning. It was meant as a fuse, no doubt, for he shovelled it into the little box, and I heard the strange noise which had previously arrested my attention.

'A minute and a half more,' he said. 'Shall you or I pull the string?'

'I will pull it,' said Muller.

He was kneeling down and holding the end in his hand. Flannigan stood behind with his arms folded, and an air of grim resolution upon his face.

I could stand it no longer. My nervous system seemed to give way in a moment.

'Stop!' I screamed, springing to my feet. 'Stop, misguided and unprincipled men!'

They both staggered backwards. I fancy they thought I was a spirit, with the moonlight streaming down upon my pale face.

I was brave enough now. I had gone too far to retreat.

'Cain was damned,' I cried, 'and he slew but one; would you have the blood of two hundred upon your souls?'

'He's mad!' said Flannigan. 'Time's up. Let it off, Muller.'

I sprang down upon the deck.

'You sha'n't do it!' I said.

'By what right do you prevent us?'

'By every right, human and divine.'

'It's no business of yours. Clear out of this!'

'Never!' said I.

'Confound the fellow! There's too much at stake to stand on ceremony. I'll hold him, Muller, while you pull the trigger.'

Next moment I was struggling in the herculean grasp of the Irishman. Resistance was useless; I was a child in his hands.

He pinned me up against the side of the vessel, and held me there.

'Now,' he said, 'look sharp. He can't prevent us.'

I felt that I was standing on the verge of eternity. Half-strangled in the arms of the taller ruffian, I saw the other approach the fatal box. He stooped over it and seized the string. I breathed one prayer when I saw his grasp tighten upon it. Then came a sharp snap, a strange rasping noise. The trigger had fallen, the side of the box flew out, and let off—*two gray carrier-pigeons!*

Little more need be said. It is not a subject on which I care to dwell. The whole thing is too utterly disgusting and absurd. Perhaps the best thing I can do is to retire gracefully from the scene, and let the sporting correspondent of the *New York Herald* fill my unworthy place. Here is an extract clipped from its columns shortly after our departure from America:

'Pigeon-flying Extraordinary.—A novel match has been brought off, last week, between the birds of John H. Flannigan, of Boston, and Jeremiah Muller, a well-known citizen of Ashport. Both men

have devoted much time and attention to an improved breed of bird, and the challenge is an old-standing one. The pigeons were backed to a large amount, and there was considerable local interest in the result. The start was from the deck of the Transatlantic steamship Spartan, at ten o'clock on the evening of the day of starting, the vessel being then reckoned to be about a hundred miles from the land. The bird which reached home first was to be declared the winner. Considerable caution had, we believe, to be observed, as British captains have a prejudice against the bringing off of sporting events aboard their vessels. In spite of some little difficulty at the last moment, the trap was sprung almost exactly at ten o'clock. Muller's bird arrived in Ashport in an extreme state of exhaustion on the following afternoon, while Flannigan's has not been heard of. The backers of the latter have the satisfaction of knowing, however, that the whole affair has been characterised by extreme fairness. The pigeons were confined in a specially invented trap, which could only be opened by the spring. It was thus possible to feed them through an aperture in the top, but any tampering with their wings was quite out of the question. A few such matches would go far towards popularising pigeon-flying in America, and form an agreeable variety to the morbid exhibitions of human endurance which have assumed such proportions during the last few years.'

A. C. D.

A QUEER FELLOW-TRAVELLER.

A True Story.

SOME years ago I had occasion to take a long journey to the north—a journey which would involve my travelling all night. A few days before, I had received an invitation from a friend of mine, who lived at a town which I had to pass, to dine and stay the night at his house; an invitation which I gladly accepted, as it would prove a pleasant break in the monotony of the journey. I resolved therefore to so arrange matters as to arrive at his house in time for dinner, and proceed to my destination next morning. When the day arrived I was very busy; so, after a hurried lunch, I packed up a few necessaries and rushed off to Euston, where I arrived with just two minutes to spare. I asked for my train, which the guard pointed out, adding, ‘If you don’t hurry up, sir, you’ll lose it.’ I took his advice, and jumped into the nearest first-class compartment, the door of which stood open, and in which there was but one other occupant. I settled myself for my journey, and for the first time had leisure to observe my fellow-traveller. Now I rather pride myself on being a judge of physiognomy, and my first impressions of him were the reverse of pleasant. He was evidently a fidgety nervous sort of man; he had restless gray eyes, without much expression in them; while his hair and beard were of a reddish hue. He was dressed in a long ulster, which I thought quite unnecessary; for though it was late in the year, the weather

was by no means cold. There was on the seat beside him a small oaken box, strongly bound with brass; and his eyes were constantly glancing from this box to me in a way that I did not at all like. I began to have visions of Fenian plots, infernal machines, and I do not know what. After regarding me steadily for a few minutes, he said,

‘Is it possible, sir, that you are not aware of this carriage being reserved for State officials?’

I looked around, and seeing no indication of the fact, replied that,

‘I was not aware of such being the case.’

‘Then, sir,’ he replied, ‘I must beg of you instantly to vacate it, and leave me here in solitary silence.’

Considering that the train was then going at the rate of about forty miles an hour, and would not stop until it reached a small station half-way to my destination in about an hour’s time, I could not quite see how I was to comply with his request, or rather command; and I frankly told him so, adding that ‘I had as much right there as he had, and did not intend moving.’

He replied with a most solemn air,

‘Then your fate be on your own head.’

This began to frighten me, for the man’s manner convinced me that he must be insane; and the prospect of an hour’s journey shut up in a first-class railway carriage with a madman was not calculated

to raise my spirits. However, I put a bold face on the matter, and affected to be engrossed with my newspaper, though in reality I was watching his every movement. He suddenly seized hold of the wooden box and held it on his knees, mumbling some inarticulate words, then suddenly replaced it beside him. In doing so I caught a glimpse of the butt of a pistol sticking out of his pocket. Here was a pretty dilemma: shut up in a railway carriage with a man who was decidedly insane, and armed with a revolver or pistol; while I had nothing more defensive than an umbrella and a roll of papers, which, in consequence of their length, I was compelled to carry in my hand. Presently he began again.

'Have you studied the marvellous powers of electricity, may I ask?'

I replied in the negative.

'I have,' said he; 'and have arrived at such a pitch of perfection that, aided by the contents of this box, I could blow this train, and everybody in it, to infinitesimal atoms.'

'But,' I hazarded, 'how about yourself?'

'I should calmly mount into the air, and survey the scene without injury.'

'How?' said I.

'That,' he replied, 'is my business; look to yourself.'

Pleasant this, for me! However, I made some remark which seemed to satisfy him; and he lapsed again into silence. I felt more than ever convinced of his madness, thinking he had probably escaped from some private asylum, for he was evidently a gentleman; yet I could not understand what the box could be which he guarded so jealously. I felt very sorry for him, in spite of my dangerous situation. I

then tried another tack, and made several commonplace remarks to him; to all of which he answered in monosyllables, suddenly bursting out with,

'Do you dare to address me, sir, without having first disclosed to me who you are? Your temerity surprises me!'

I thought it best to humour him, and handed him my card, on which was inscribed: 'J. B. Smith, Quality Court.'

'Ha, I guessed you were a Smith; you look like one; a blacksmith, if I may judge by the smuts on your face.' Here he broke into a maniacal laugh. When he had finished laughing, he said, 'Do you want to know who I am?'

I said I thought I might as well know his name, if he did not mind.

'Well,' said he, leaning forward, and peering into my eyes, keeping one hand on the box, 'when you first jumped into the carriage I was the Khan of Tartary; but the wonders of electricity are such that I am even now changing; I may be anybody in a few hours, or even minutes.' I suppose I looked surprised, for he went on, 'Ah, you look surprised; but perhaps you will hardly believe that my temper quite depends on who I may happen to be. Not long ago I was conversing with some friends, and I suddenly changed into the King of Siam, and before they could get out of my way I bit three of their fingers off. You should have seen them scatter. Ha, ha, ha!'

'Good gracious!' I exclaimed. 'You don't mean it!'

'O, yes, I do; but do not be alarmed, I never am so dangerous unless I happen to assume that character.'

Then he sat quiet, and I was

thankful for a little peace. On looking at my watch I found that we had yet another quarter of an hour before the train would stop. How I wished the time away! for I fully intended to change my carriage at the next stopping station. All at once, to my alarm, he said quite unconcernedly,

‘I feel it my solemn duty to inform you that I am changing, and that in a few minutes I shall be the King of Siam.’

Instinctively I looked around for some means of escape, at the same time grasping my umbrella firm, resolved at least to sell *my* fingers dearly. Never shall I forget the feeling of thankfulness with which I heard the whistle of the train announcing our approach to the next station. I collected my things together near me, so as to be prepared for a hasty exit, the more so as I noticed the feelings of his Majesty of Siam were being worked up to a pitch of excitement, and the way he showed his teeth would have terrified a far less nervous man than myself. As we neared the station the train slackened speed, and at last stopped. Just as I jumped out the maniac made a spring at me; but I fortunately avoided him, and slammed the door in his face. I got into the next compartment, which was empty; and, as the guard closed the door, I called out, ‘Here, I say, guard, there is a madman in—’ But the whistle drowned the rest of my sentence, and the train moved off before I had time to complete it. I sat still in a horrible state of nervousness, expecting I hardly know what.

At last the train stopped at the station for which I was bound, and I jumped out. As I passed the carriage I could see him sitting there quietly; and I went

into the station-master’s room and told him shortly what had happened, advising him to take some means of securing him. He promised to telegraph, but said it was no business of his; and with this assurance I had to be content.

I then went off to my friend’s house, where I arrived just in time for dinner. I suppose the traces of my fright still remained; for no sooner did I enter the dining-room than my host exclaimed,

‘Why, what is the matter, old man? You’ve not met a ghost on the road, have you?’

I told him I had seen somebody a good deal worse than a ghost; and, during dinner, I related my adventure, upon which they all congratulated me on my lucky escape. After dinner I went off early to bed, pleading fatigue and the next day’s business as my excuse.

When I awoke in the morning, I found my host ready for breakfast; and I joined him at once, as my train left in an hour’s time. As I shook hands with him at the station, he remarked that he should like to hear of the man being caught.

I transacted my business; and, as I had time to spare, I turned into the first hotel I came to, and walked up into the billiard-room, where I met Fred Charlton, an old schoolfellow of mine, who was playing billiards with three other fellows. He seemed surprised to see me, and asked me how I got there. I told him I had come down there early that morning; and I then proceeded to give him a sketch of my adventurous journey of the night before. Fred smiled, and said,

‘Ah, yes, old man; I heard something about it.’

‘You heard something?’ I said. ‘From whom?’

‘Well,’ he replied, ‘I’ll tell you all about it, for the benefit of the company. Old Harris, the diamond merchant, told me last night that he had just come down from London. When he had taken his seat in the carriage at Euston all alone, just as the train started, some fellow rushed at his carriage, and jumped in. Harris said he did not much like the look of the fellow; and, as he had about eight thousand pounds’ worth of diamonds with him in a small box, he began to feel uncomfortable. He said the stranger was a strong active man, and that if it had come to a struggle for the diamonds Harris would have had no chance—for he evidently felt sure the fellow meant robbery;

so he determined to try and frighten him out of the carriage by pretending madness, which he says he did so effectually that the fellow, in sheer fright, bolted at the first stoppage, and left him to finish his journey here alone. But we did not know that you were the hero, old man,’ said Fred, as the whole four burst into such a shout of laughter as I never heard before. ‘You must stay, and be introduced to him afresh; he will be here to-night.’

I did not stop to hear anything more. I rushed down-stairs, thoroughly realising that I had been made a fool, caught the first train home, and have not shown myself in that neighbourhood since.

W. B. R.

THE SINGLE CHARM.

(*From the German of Herder.*)

Not beauty, O thou maiden fair—
Not beauty do we prize;
For, like the sunshine’s blazing glare,
’Twill only daze our eyes.

In thine attire, O maiden fair,
No charms we can descry;
The peacock in his train doth wear
Hues which its sheen outvie.

And wit’s keen dart, an arrow light,
Doth seldom pierce the heart;
It speedeth by in rapid flight,
Leaves but a stinging smart!

One charm there is all hearts to sway—
One charm alone, I ween;
Dost thou possess it, maiden—say?
’Tis *artlessness* I mean!

BARONESS SWIFT.

BONES,

The April Fool of Harvey's Sluice.

ABE DURTON'S cabin was not beautiful. People have been heard to assert that it was ugly, and, even after the fashion of Harvey's Sluice, have gone the length of prefixing their adjective with a forcible expletive which emphasised their criticism. Abe, however, was a stolid and easy-going man, on whose mind the remarks of an unappreciative public made but little impression. He had built the house himself, and it suited his partner and him, and what more did they want? Indeed he was rather touchy upon the subject. 'Though I says it as raised it,' he remarked, 'it'll lay over any shanty in the valley. Holes? Well, of course there are holes. You wouldn't get fresh air without holes. There's nothing stuffy about *my* house. Rain? Well, if it does let the rain in, ain't it an advantage to know its rainin' without gettin' up to unbar the door. I wouldn't own a house that didn't leak some. As to its bein' off the perpendic'lar, I like a house with a bit of a tilt. Anyways it pleases my pard, Boss Morgan, and what's good enough for him is good enough for you, I suppose.' At which approach to personalities his antagonist usually sheered off, and left the honours of the field to the indignant architect.

But whatever difference of opinion might exist as to the beauty of the establishment, there could be no question as to its utility. To the tired wayfarer, plodding along the Buckhurst-

road in the direction of the Sluice, the warm glow upon the summit of the hill was a beacon of hope and of comfort. Those very holes at which the neighbours sneered helped to diffuse a cheery atmosphere of light around, which was doubly acceptable on such a night as the present.

There was only one man inside the hut, and that was the proprietor, Abe Durton himself, or 'Bones,' as he had been christened with the rude heraldry of the camp. He was sitting in front of the great wood fire, gazing moodily into its glowing depths, and occasionally giving a faggot a kick of remonstrance when it showed any indication of dying into a smoulder. His fair Saxon face, with its bold simple eyes and crisp yellow beard, stood out sharp and clear against the darkness as the flickering light played over it. It was a manly resolute countenance, and yet the physiognomist might have detected something in the lines of the mouth which showed a weakness somewhere, an indecision which contrasted strangely with his herculean shoulders and massive limbs. Abe's was one of those trusting simple natures which are as easy to lead as they are impossible to drive; and it was this happy pliability of disposition which made him at once the butt and the favourite of the dwellers in the Sluice. Badinage in that primitive settlement was of a somewhat ponderous character, yet no amount of chaff had ever

brought a dark look on Bones's face, or an unkind thought into his honest heart. It was only when his aristocratic partner was, as he thought, being put upon, that an ominous tightness about his lower lip and an angry light in his blue eyes caused even the most irrepressible humorist in the colony to nip his favourite joke in the bud, in order to diverge into an earnest and all-absorbing dissertation upon the state of the weather.

'The Boss is late to-night,' he muttered as he rose from his chair and stretched himself in a colossal yawn. 'My stars, how it does rain and blow! Don't it, Blinky?' Blinky was a demure and meditative owl, whose comfort and welfare was a chronic subject of solicitude to its master, and who at present contemplated him gravely from one of the rafters. 'Pity you can't speak, Blinky,' continued Abe, glancing up at his feathered companion. 'There's a powerful deal of sense in your face. Kinder melancholy too. Crossed in love, maybe, when you was young. Talkin' of love,' he added, 'I've not seen Susan to-day;' and lighting the candle which stood in a black bottle upon the table, he walked across the room and peered earnestly at one of the many pictures from stray illustrated papers, which had been cut out by the occupants and posted up upon the walls.

The particular picture which attracted him was one which represented a very tawdrily-dressed actress simpering over a bouquet at an imaginary audience. This sketch had, for some inscrutable reason, made a deep impression upon the susceptible heart of the miner. He had invested the young lady with a human interest by solemnly, and without the slightest warrant, christening her as

Susan Banks, and had then installed her as his standard of female beauty.

'You see my Susan,' he would say, when some wanderer from Buckhurst, or even from Melbourne, would describe some fair Circe whom he had left behind him. 'There ain't a girl like my Sue. If ever you go to the old country again, just you ask to see her. Susan Banks is her name, and I've got her picture up at the shanty.'

Abe was still gazing at his charmer when the rough door was flung open, and a blinding cloud of sleet and rain came driving into the cabin, almost obscuring for the moment a young man who sprang in and proceeded to bar the entrance behind him, an operation which the force of the wind rendered no easy matter. He might have passed for the genius of the storm, with the water dripping from his long hair and running down his pale refined face.

'Well,' he said, in a slightly peevish voice, 'haven't you got any supper?'

'Waiting and ready,' said his companion cheerily, pointing to a large pot which bubbled by the side of the fire. 'You seem sort of damp.'

'Damp be hanged! I'm soaked, man, thoroughly saturated. It's a night that I wouldn't have a dog out, at least not a dog that I had any respect for. Hand over that dry coat from the peg.'

Jack Morgan, or Boss, as he was usually called, belonged to a type which was commoner in the mines during the flush times of the first great rush than would be supposed. He was a man of good blood, liberally educated, and a graduate of an English university. Boss should, in the natural course of things, have been an energetic

curate, or struggling professional man, had not some latent traits cropped out in his character, inherited possibly from old Sir Henry Morgan, who had founded the family with Spanish pieces of eight gallantly won upon the high seas. It was this wild strain of blood no doubt which had caused him to drop from the bedroom-window of the ivy-clad English parsonage, and leave home and friends behind him, to try his luck with pick and shovel in the Australian fields. In spite of his effeminate face and dainty manners, the rough dwellers in Harvey's Sluice had gradually learned that the little man was possessed of a cool courage and unflinching resolution, which won respect in a community where pluck was looked upon as the highest of human attributes. No one ever knew how it was that Bones and he had become partners; yet partners they were, and the large simple nature of the stronger man looked with an almost superstitious reverence upon the clear decisive mind of his companion.

'That's better,' said the Boss, as he dropped into the vacant chair before the fire and watched Abe laying out the two metal plates, with the horn-handled knives and abnormally pronged forks. 'Take your mining boots off, Bones; there's no use filling the cabin with red clay. Come here and sit down.'

His gigantic partner came meekly over and perched himself upon the top of a barrel.

'What's up?' he asked.

'Shares are up,' said his companion. 'That's what's up. Look here,' and he extracted a crumpled paper from the pocket of the steaming coat. 'Here's the *Buckhurst Sentinel*. Read this article—this one here about a paying lead in the Conemara mine. We

hold pretty heavily in that concern, my boy. We might sell out to-day and clear something—but I think we'll hold on.'

Abe Durton in the mean time was laboriously spelling out the article in question, following the lines with his great forefinger, and muttering under his tawny moustache.

'Two hundred dollars a foot,' he said, looking up. 'Why, pard, we hold a hundred feet each. It would give us twenty thousand dollars! We might go home on that.'

'Nonsense!' said his companion; 'we've come out here for something better than a beggarly couple of thousand pounds. The thing is bound to pay. Sinclair the assayer has been over there, and says there's a ledge of the richest quartz he ever set eyes on. It is just a case of getting the machinery to crush it. By the way, what was to-day's take like?'

Abe extracted a small wooden box from his pocket and handed it to his comrade. It contained what appeared to be about a teaspoonful of sand and one or two little metallic granules not larger than a pea. Boss Morgan laughed, and returned it to his companion.

'We sha'n't make our fortune at that rate, Bones,' he remarked; and there was a pause in the conversation as the two men listened to the wind as it screamed and whistled past the little cabin.

'Any news from Buckhurst?' asked Abe, rising and proceeding to extract their supper from the pot.

'Nothing much,' said his companion. 'Cock-eyed Joe has been shot by Billy Reid in McFarlane's Store.'

'Ah,' said Abe, with listless interest.

'Bushrangers have been around and stuck up the Rochdale station.

They say they are coming over here.'

The miner whistled as he poured some whisky into a jug.

'Anything more?' he asked.

'Nothing of importance except that the blacks have been showing a bit down New Sterling way, and that the assayer has bought a piano and is going to have his daughter out from Melbourne to live in the new house opposite on the other side of the road. So you see we are going to have something to look at, my boy,' he added as he sat down, and began attacking the food set before him. 'They say she is a beauty, Bones.'

'She won't be a patch on my Sue,' returned the other decisively.

His partner smiled as he glanced round at the flaring print upon the wall. Suddenly he dropped his knife and seemed to listen. Amid the wild uproar of the wind and the rain there was a low rumbling sound which was evidently not dependent upon the elements.

'What's that?'

'Darned if I know.'

The two men made for the door and peered out earnestly into the darkness. Far away along the Buckhurst road they could see a moving light, and the dull sound was louder than before.

'It's a buggy coming down,' said Abe.

'Where is it going to?'

'Don't know. Across the ford, I s'pose.'

'Why, man, the ford will be six feet deep to-night, and running like a mill-stream.'

The light was nearer now, coming rapidly round the curve of the road. There was a wild sound of galloping with the rattle of the wheels.

'Horses have bolted, by thunder!'

'Bad job for the man inside.'

There was a rough individuality about the inhabitants of Harvey's Sluice, in virtue of which every man bore his misfortunes upon his own shoulders, and had very little sympathy for those of his neighbours. The predominant feeling of the two men was one of pure curiosity as they watched the swinging swaying lanterns coming down the winding road.

'If he don't pull 'em up before they reach the ford he's a goner,' remarked Abe Durton resignedly.

Suddenly there came a lull in the sullen splash of the rain. It was but for a moment, but in that moment there came down on the breeze a long cry which caused the two men to start and stare at each other, and then to rush frantically down the steep incline towards the road below.

'A woman, by Heaven!' gasped Abe, as he sprang across the gaping shaft of a mine in the recklessness of his haste.

Morgan was the lighter and more active man. He drew away rapidly from his stalwart companion. Within a minute he was standing panting and bare-headed in the middle of the soft muddy road, while his partner was still toiling down the side of the declivity.

The carriage was close on him now. He could see in the light of the lamps the raw-boned Australian horse as, terrified by the storm and by its own clatter, it came tearing down the declivity which led to the ford. The man who was driving seemed to see the pale set face in the pathway in front of him, for he yelled out some incoherent words of warning, and made a last desperate attempt to pull up. There was a shout, an oath, and a jarring crash, and Abe, hurrying down, saw a wild infuriated horse rearing madly in the air with a slim

dark figure hanging on to its bridle. Boss, with the keen power of calculation which had made him the finest cricketer at Rugby in his day, had caught the rein immediately below the bit, and clung to it with silent concentration. Once he was down with a heavy thud in the roadway as the horse jerked its head violently forwards, but when, with a snort of exultation, the animal pressed on, it was only to find that the prostrate man beneath its forehoofs still maintained his unyielding grasp.

'Hold it, Bones,' he said, as a tall figure hurled itself into the road and seized the other rein.

'All right, old man, I've got him;' and the horse, cowed by the sight of a fresh assailant, quieted down, and stood shivering with terror. 'Get up, Boss, it's safe now.'

But poor Boss lay groaning in the mud.

'I can't do it, Bones.' There was a catch in the voice as of pain. 'There's something wrong, old chap, but don't make a fuss. It's only a shake; give me a lift up.'

Abe bent tenderly over his prostrate companion. He could see that he was very white, and breathing with difficulty.

'Cheer up, old Boss,' he murmured. 'Hullo! my stars!'

The last two exclamations were shot out of the honest miner's bosom as if they were impelled by some irresistible force, and he took a couple of steps backward in sheer amazement. There at the other side of the fallen man, and half shrouded in the darkness, stood what appeared to Abe's simple soul to be the most beautiful vision that ever had appeared upon earth. To eyes accustomed to rest upon nothing more captivating than the ruddy faces and rough beards of the miners in the

Sluice, it seemed that that fair delicate countenance must belong to a wanderer from some better world. Abe gazed at it with a wondering reverence, oblivious for the moment even of his injured friend upon the ground.

'O papa,' said the apparition, in great distress, 'he is hurt, the gentleman is hurt;' and with a quick feminine gesture of sympathy, she bent her lithe figure over Boss Morgan's prostrate figure.

'Why, it's Abe Durton and his partner,' said the driver of the buggy, coming forward and disclosing the grizzled features of Mr. Joshua Sinclair, the assayer to the mines. 'I don't know how to thank you, boys. The infernal brute got the bit between his teeth, and I should have had to have thrown Carrie out and chanced it in another minute. That's right,' he continued, as Morgan staggered to his feet. 'Not much hurt, I hope.'

'I can get up to the hut now,' said the young man, steadying himself upon his partner's shoulder. 'How are you going to get Miss Sinclair home?'

'O, we can walk,' said that young lady, shaking off the effects of her fright with all the elasticity of youth.

'We can drive and take the road round the bank so as to avoid the ford,' said her father. 'The horse seems cowed enough now; you need not be afraid of it, Carrie. I hope we shall see you at the house, both of you. Neither of us can easily forget this night's work.'

Miss Carrie said nothing, but she managed to shoot a little demure glance of gratitude from under her long lashes, to have won which honest Abe felt that he would have cheerfully undertaken to stop a runaway locomotive.

There was a cheery shout of 'Good-night,' a crack of the whip, and the buggy rattled away in the darkness.

'You told me the men were rough and nasty, pa,' said Miss Carrie Sinclair, after a long silence, when the two dark shadows had died away in the distance, and the carriage was speeding along by the turbulent stream. 'I don't think so. I think they are very nice.' And Carrie was unusually quiet for the remainder of her journey, and seemed more reconciled to the hardship of leaving her dear friend Amelia in the far-off boarding school at Melbourne.

That did not prevent her from writing a full, true, and particular account of their little adventure to the same young lady upon that very night.

'They stopped the horse, darling, and one poor fellow was hurt. And O, Amy, if you had seen the other one in a red shirt, with a pistol at his waist! I couldn't help thinking of you, dear. He was just your idea. You remember, a yellow moustache and great blue eyes. And how he did stare at poor me! You never see such men in Burke-street, Amy;' and so on, for four pages of pretty feminine gossip.

In the mean time poor Boss, badly shaken, had been helped up the hill by his partner and regained the shelter of the shanty. Abe doctored him out of the rude pharmacopœia of the camp, and bandaged up his strained arm. Both were men of few words, and neither made any allusion to what had taken place. It was noticed, however, by Blinky that his master failed to pay his usual nightly orisons before the shrine of Susan Banks. Whether this sagacious fowl drew any deductions from this, and from the fact that Bones sat long and earnestly smoking

by the smouldering fire, I know not. Suffice it that as the candle died away and the miner rose from his chair, his feathered friend flew down upon his shoulder, and was only prevented from giving vent to a sympathetic hoot by Abe's warning finger, and its own strong inherent sense of propriety.

A casual visitor dropping into the straggling township of Harvey's Sluice shortly after Miss Carrie Sinclair's arrival would have noticed a considerable alteration in the manners and customs of its inhabitants. Whether it was the refining influence of a woman's presence, or whether it sprang from an emulation excited by the brilliant appearance of Abe Durton, it is hard to say—probably from a blending of the two. Certain it is that that young man had suddenly developed an affection for cleanliness and a regard for the conventionalities of civilisation, which aroused the astonishment and ridicule of his companions. That Boss Morgan should pay attention to his personal appearance had long been set down as a curious and inexplicable phenomenon, depending upon early education; but that loose-limbed easy-going Bones should flaunt about in a clean shirt was regarded by every grimy denizen of the Sluice as a direct and premeditated insult. In self-defence, therefore, there was a general cleaning up after working hours, and such a run upon the grocery establishment, that soap went up to an unprecedented figure, and a fresh consignment had to be ordered from McFarlane's store in Buckhurst.

'Is this here a free minin' camp, or is it a darned Sunday-school?' had been the indignant query of Long McCoy, a promi-

ment member of the reactionary party, who had failed to advance with the times, having been absent during the period of regeneration. But his remonstrance met with but little sympathy; and at the end of a couple of days a general turbidity of the creek announced his surrender, which was confirmed by his appearance in the Colonial Bar with a shining and bashful face, and hair which was redolent of bear's grease.

'I felt kinder lonesome,' he remarked apologetically, 'so I thought as I'd have a look what was under the clay;' and he viewed himself approvingly in the cracked mirror which graced the select room of the establishment.

Our casual visitor would have noticed a remarkable change also in the conversation of the community. Somehow, when a certain dainty little bonnet with a sweet girlish figure beneath it was seen in the distance among the disused shafts and mounds of red earth which disfigured the sides of the valley, there was a warning murmur, and a general clearing off of the cloud of blasphemy, which was, I regret to state, an habitual characteristic of the working population of Harvey's Sluice. Such things only need a beginning; and it was noticeable that long after Miss Sinclair had vanished from sight there was a decided rise in the moral barometer of the gulches. Men found by experience that their stock of adjectives was less limited than they had been accustomed to suppose, and that the less forcible were sometimes even more adapted for conveying their meaning.

Abe had formerly been considered one of the most experienced valuers of an ore in the settlement. It had been commonly supposed that he was able to estimate the amount of gold in

a fragment of quartz with remarkable exactness. This, however, was evidently a mistake, otherwise he would never have incurred the useless expense of having so many worthless specimens assayed as he now did. Mr. Joshua Sinclair found himself inundated with such a flood of fragments of mica, and lumps of rock containing decimal percentages of the precious metals, that he began to form a very low opinion of the young man's mining capabilities. It is even asserted that Abe shuffled up to the house one morning with a hopeful smile, and, after some fumbling, produced half a brick from the bosom of his jersey, with the stereotyped remark 'that he thought he'd struck it at last, and so had dropped in to ask him to cipher out an estimate.' As this anecdote rests, however, upon the unsupported evidence of Jim Struggles, the humorist of the camp, there may be some slight inaccuracy of detail.

It is certain that what with professional business in the morning and social visits at night, the tall figure of the miner was a familiar object in the little drawing room of Azalea Villa, as the new house of the assayer had been magniloquently named. He seldom ventured upon a remark in the presence of its female occupant; but would sit on the extreme edge of his chair in a state of speechless admiration while she rattled off some lively air upon the newly-imported piano. Many were the strange and unexpected places in which his feet turned up. Miss Carrie had gradually come to the conclusion that they were entirely independent of his body, and had ceased to speculate upon the manner in which she would trip over them on one side of the table while the blushing

owner was apologising from the other. There was only one cloud on honest Bones's mental horizon, and that was the periodical appearance of Black Tom Ferguson, of Rochdale Ferry. This clever young scamp had managed to ingratiate himself with old Joshua, and was a constant visitor at the villa. There were evil rumours abroad about Black Tom. He was known to be a gambler, and shrewdly suspected to be worse. Harvey's Sluice was not censorious, and yet there was a general feeling that Ferguson was a man to be avoided. There was a reckless *élan* about his bearing, however, and a sparkle in his conversation, which had an indescribable charm, and even induced the Boss, who was particular in such matters, to cultivate his acquaintance while forming a correct estimate of his character. Miss Carrie seemed to hail his appearance as a relief, and chattered away for hours about books and music and the gaieties of Melbourne. It was on these occasions that poor simple Bones would sink into the very lowest depths of despondency, and either slink away, or sit glaring at his rival with an earnest malignancy which seemed to cause that gentleman no small amusement.

The miner made no secret to his partner of the admiration which he entertained for Miss Sinclair. If he was silent in her company, he was voluble enough when she was the subject of discourse. Loiterers upon the Buckhurst-road might have heard a stentorian voice upon the hill-side bellowing forth a vocabulary of female charms. He submitted his difficulties to the superior intelligence of the Boss.

'That loafer from Rochdale,' he said, 'he seems to reel it off kinder nat'ral, while for the life

of me I can't say a word. Tell me, Boss, what would *you* say to a girl like that?

'Why, talk about what would interest her,' said his companion.

'Ah, that's where it lies.'

'Talk about the customs of the place and the country,' said the Boss, pulling meditatively at his pipe. 'Tell her stories of what you have seen in the mines, and that sort of thing.'

'Eh? You'd do that, would you?' responded his comrade more hopefully. 'If that's the hang of it I am right. I'll go up now and tell her about Chicago Bill, an' how he put them two bullets in the man from the bend the night of the dance.'

Boss Morgan laughed.

'That's hardly the thing,' he said. 'You'd frighten her if you told her that. Tell her something lighter, you know; something to amuse her, something funny.'

'Funny?' said the anxious lover, with less confidence in his voice. 'How you and me made Mat Houlahan drunk and put him in the pulpit of the Baptist church, and he wouldn't let the preacher in in the morning. How would that do, eh?'

'For Heaven's sake don't say anything of the sort,' said his Mentor, in great consternation. 'She'd never speak to either of us again. No, what I mean is that you should tell about the habits of the mines, how men live and work and die there. If she is a sensible girl that ought to interest her.'

'How they live at the mines? Pard, you are good to me. How they live? There's a thing I can talk of as glib as Black Tom or any man. I'll try it on her when I see her.'

'By the way,' said his partner listlessly, 'just keep an eye on that man Ferguson. His hands

arn't very clean, you know, and he's not scrupulous when he is aiming for anything. You remember how Dick Williams, of English Town, was found dead in the bush. Of course it was rangers that did it. They do say, however, that Black Tom owed him a deal more money than he could ever have paid. There's been one or two queer things about him. Keep your eye on him, Abe. Watch what he does.'

'I will,' said his companion.

And he did. He watched him that very night. Watched him stride out of the house of the assayer with anger and baffled pride on every feature of his handsome swarthy face. Watched him clear the garden paling at a bound, pass in long rapid strides down the side of the valley, gesticulating wildly with his hands, and vanish into the bushland beyond. All this Abe Durton watched, and with a thoughtful look upon his face he relit his pipe and strolled slowly backward to the hut upon the hill.

March was drawing to a close in Harvey's Sluice, and the glare and heat of the antipodean summer had toned down into the rich mellow hues of autumn. It was never a lovely place to look upon. There was something hopelessly prosaic in the two bare rugged ridges, seamed and scarred by the hand of man, with iron arms of windlasses, and broken buckets projecting everywhere through the endless little hillocks of red earth. Down the middle ran the deeply rutted road from Buckhurst, winding along and crossing the sluggish tide of Harper's Creek by a crumbling wooden bridge. Beyond the bridge lay the cluster of little huts with the Colonial Bar and the Grocery towering in all the dignity of

whitewash among the humble dwellings around. The assayer's verandah-lined house lay above the gulches on the side of the slope nearly opposite the dilapidated specimen of architecture of which our friend Abe was so unreasonably proud.

There was one other building which might have come under the category of what an inhabitant of the Sluice would have described as a 'public edifice' with a comprehensive wave of his pipe which conjured up images of an endless vista of colonnades and minarets. This was the Baptist chapel, a modest little shingle-roofed erection on the bend of the river about a mile above the settlement. It was from this that the town looked at its best, when the harsh outlines and crude colours were somewhat softened by distance. On that particular morning the stream looked pretty as it meandered down the valley; pretty, too, was the long rising upland behind, with its luxuriant green covering; and prettiest of all was Miss Carrie Sinclair, as she laid down the basket of ferns which she was carrying, and stopped upon the summit of the rising ground.

Something seemed to be amiss with that young lady. There was a look of anxiety upon her face which contrasted strangely with her usual appearance of piquant insouciance. Some recent annoyance had left its traces upon her. Perhaps it was to walk it off that she had rambled down the valley; certain it is that she inhaled the fresh breezes of the woodlands as if their resinous fragrance bore with them some antidote for human sorrow.

She stood for some time gazing at the view before her. She could see her father's house, like a white dot upon the hillside, though

strangely enough it was a blue reek of smoke upon the opposite slope which seemed to attract the greater part of her attention. She lingered there, watching it with a wistful look in her hazel eyes. Then the loneliness of her situation seemed to strike her, and she felt one of those spasmodic fits of unreasoning terror to which the bravest women are subject. Tales of natives and of bushrangers, their daring and their cruelty, flashed across her. She glanced at the great mysterious stretch of silent bushland beside her, and stooped to pick up her basket with the intention of hurrying along the road in the direction of the gulches. She started round, and hardly suppressed a scream as a long red-flannelled arm shot out from behind her and withdrew the basket from her very grasp.

The figure which met her eye would to some have seemed little calculated to allay her fears. The high boots, the rough shirt, and the broad girdle with its weapons of death were, however, too familiar to Miss Carrie to be objects of terror; and when above them all she saw a pair of tender blue eyes looking down upon her, and a half-abashed smile lurking under a thick yellow moustache, she knew that for the remainder of that walk ranger and black would be equally powerless to harm her.

'O Mr. Durton,' she said, 'how you did startle me!'

'I'm sorry, miss,' said Abe, in great trepidation at having caused his idol one moment's uneasiness. 'You see,' he continued, with simple cunning, 'the weather bein' fine and my partner gone prospectin', I thought I'd walk up to Hagley's Hill and round back by the bend, and there I sees you accidental-like and promiscuous a-standin' on a hillock.' This astounding falsehood was reeled off

by the miner with great fluency, and an artificial sincerity which at once stamped it as a fabrication. Bones had concocted and rehearsed it while tracking the little footsteps in the clay, and looked upon it as the very depth of human guile. Miss Carrie did not venture upon a remark, but there was a gleam of amusement in her eyes which puzzled her lover.

Abe was in good spirits this morning. It may have been the sunshine, or it may have been the rapid rise of shares in the Conemara, which lightened his heart. I am inclined to think, however, that it was referable to neither of these causes. Simple as he was, the scene which he had witnessed the night before could only lead to one conclusion. He pictured himself walking as wildly down the valley under similar circumstances, and his heart was touched with pity for his rival. He felt very certain that the ill-omened face of Mr. Thomas Ferguson of Rochdale Ferry would never more be seen within the walls of Azalea Villa. Then why did she refuse him? He was handsome, he was fairly rich. Could it—? no, it couldn't; of course it couldn't; how could it! The idea was ridiculous—so very ridiculous that it had fermented in the young man's brain all night, and that he could do nothing but ponder over it in the morning, and cherish it in his perturbed bosom.

They passed down the red pathway together, and along by the river's bank. Abe had relapsed into his normal condition of taciturnity. He had made one gallant effort to hold forth upon the subject of ferns, stimulated by the basket which he held in his hand, but the theme was not a thrilling one, and after a spasmodic

flicker he had abandoned the attempt. While coming along he had been full of racy anecdotes and humorous observations. He had rehearsed innumerable remarks which were to be poured into Miss Sinclair's appreciative ear. But now his brain seemed of a sudden to have become a vacuum, and utterly devoid of any idea save an insane and overpowering impulse to comment upon the heat of the sun. No astronomer who ever reckoned a parallax was so entirely absorbed in the condition of the celestial bodies as honest Bones while he trudged along by the slow-flowing Australian river.

Suddenly his conversation with his partner came back into his mind. What was it Boss had said upon the subject? 'Tell her how they live at the mines.' He revolved it in his brain. It seemed a curious thing to talk about; but Boss had said it, and Boss was always right. He would take the plunge; so with a premonitory hem he blurted out,

'They live mostly on bacon and beans in the valley.'

He could not see what effect this communication had upon his companion. He was too tall to be able to peer under the little straw bonnet. She did not answer. He would try again.

'Mutton on Sundays,' he said.

Even this failed to arouse any enthusiasm. In fact she seemed to be laughing. Boss was evidently wrong. The young man was in despair. The sight of a ruined hut beside the pathway conjured up a fresh idea. He grasped at it as a drowning man to a straw.

'Cockney Jack built that,' he remarked. 'Lived there till he died.'

'What did he die of?' asked his companion.

'Three star brandy,' said Abe

decisively. 'I used to come over of a night when he was bad and sit by him. Poor chap! he had a wife and two children in Putney. He'd rave, and call me Polly, by the hour. He was cleaned out, hadn't a red cent; but the boys collected rough gold enough to see him through. He's buried there in that shaft; that was his claim, so we just dropped him down it an' filled it up. Put down his pick too, an' a spade an' a bucket, so's he'd feel kinder perky and at home.'

Miss Carrie seemed more interested now.

'Do they often die like that?' she asked.

'Well, brandy kills many; but there's more get's dropped—shot, you know.'

'I don't mean that. Do many men die alone and miserable down there, with no one to care for them?' and she pointed to the cluster of houses beneath them. 'Is there any one dying now? It is awful to think of.'

'There's none as I knows on likely to throw up their hand.'

'I wish you wouldn't use so much slang, Mr. Durton,' said Carrie, looking up at him reprovingly out of her violet eyes. It was strange what an air of proprietorship this young lady was gradually assuming towards her gigantic companion. 'You know it isn't polite. You should get a dictionary and learn the proper words.'

'Ah, that's it,' said Bones apologetically. 'It's gettin' your hand on the proper one. When you've not got a steam drill, you've got to put up with a pick.'

'Yes, but it's easy if you really try. You could say that a man was "dying," or "moribund," if you like.'

'That's it,' said the miner enthusiastically. '"Moribund"!

That's a word. Why, you could lay over Boss Morgan in the matter of words. "Moribund!" There's some sound about that.'

Carrie laughed.

'It's not the sound you must think of, but whether it will express your meaning. Seriously, Mr. Durton, if any one should be ill in the camp you must let me know. I can nurse, and I might be of use. You will, won't you?'

Abe readily acquiesced, and relapsed into silence as he pondered over the possibility of inoculating himself with some long and tedious disease. There was a mad dog reported from Buckhurst. Perhaps something might be done with that.

'And now I must say good-morning,' said Carrie, as they came to the spot where a crooked pathway branched off from the track and wound up to Azalea Villa. 'Thank you ever so much for escorting me.'

In vain Abe pleaded for the additional hundred yards, and adduced the overwhelming weight of the diminutive basket as a cogent reason. The young lady was inexorable. She had taken him too far out of his way already. She was ashamed of herself; she wouldn't hear of it.

So poor Bones departed in a mixture of many opposite feelings. He had interested her. She had spoken kindly to him. But then she had sent him away before there was any necessity; she couldn't care much about him if she would do that. I think he might have felt a little more cheerful, however, had he seen Miss Carrie Sinclair as she watched his retiring figure from the garden-gate with a loving look upon her saucy face, and a mischievous smile at his bent head and desponding appearance.

The Colonial Bar was the favourite haunt of the inhabitants of Harvey's Sluice in their hours of relaxation. There had been a fierce competition between it and the rival establishment termed the Grocery, which, in spite of its innocent appellation, aspired also to dispense spirituous refreshments. The importation of chairs into the latter had led to the appearance of a settee in the former. Spittoons appeared in the Grocery against a picture in the Bar, and, as the frequenters expressed it, the honours were even. When, however, the Grocery led a window-curtain, and its opponent returned a snuggery and a mirror, the game was declared to be in favour of the latter, and Harvey's Sluice showed its sense of the spirit of the proprietor by withdrawing their custom from his opponent.

Though every man was at liberty to swagger into the Bar itself, and bask in the shimmer of its many coloured bottles, there was a general feeling that the snuggery, or special apartment, should be reserved for the use of the more prominent citizens. It was in this room that committees met, that opulent companies were conceived and born, and that inquests were generally held. The latter, I regret to state, was, in 1861, a pretty frequent ceremony at the Sluice; and the findings of the coroner were sometimes characterised by a fine breezy originality. Witness when Bully Burke, a notorious desperado, was shot down by a quiet young medical man, and a sympathetic jury brought in that 'the deceased had met his death in an ill-advised attempt to stop a pistol-ball while in motion,' a verdict which was looked upon as a triumph of jurisprudence in the camp, as simultaneously exonerating the culprit,

and adhering to the rigid and undeniable truth.

On this particular evening there was an assemblage of notabilities in the snugger, though no such pathological ceremony had called them together. Many changes had occurred of late which merited discussion; and it was in this chamber, gorgeous in all the effete luxury of the mirror and settee, that Harvey's Sluice was wont to exchange ideas. The recent cleansing of the population was still causing some ferment in men's minds. Then there was Miss Sinclair and her movements to be commented on, and the paying lead in the Conemara, and the recent rumours of bushrangers. It was no wonder that the leading men in the township had come together in the Colonial Bar.

The rangers were the present subject of discussion. For some few days rumours of their presence had been flying about, and an uneasy feeling had pervaded the colony. Physical fear was a thing little known in Harvey's Sluice. The miners would have turned out to hunt down the desperadoes with as much zest as if they had been so many kangaroos. It was the presence of a large quantity of gold in the town which caused anxiety. It was felt that the fruits of their labour must be secured at any cost. Messages had been sent over to Buckhurst for as many troopers as could be spared, and in the mean time the main street of the Sluice was paraded at night by volunteer sentinels.

A fresh impetus had been given to the panic by the report brought in to-day by Jim Struggles. Jim was of an ambitious and aspiring turn of mind, and after gazing in silent disgust at his last week's clean up, he had metaphorically shaken the clay of Harvey's Sluice

from his feet, and had started off into the woods with the intention of prospecting round until he could hit upon some likely piece of ground for himself. Jim's story was that he was sitting upon a fallen trunk eating his mid-day damper and rusty bacon, when his trained ear had caught the clink of horses' hoofs. He had hardly time to take the precaution of rolling off the tree and crouching down behind it, before a troop of men came riding down through the bush, and passed within a stone-throw of him.

'There was Bill Smeaton and Murphy Duff,' said Struggles, naming two notorious ruffians; 'and there was three more that I couldn't rightly see. And they took the trail to the right, and looked like business all over, with their guns in their hands.'

Jim was submitted to a searching cross-examination that evening; but nothing could shake his testimony or throw a further light upon what he had seen. He told the story several times and at long intervals; and though there might be a pleasing variety in the minor incidents, the main facts were always identically the same. The matter began to look serious.

There were a few, however, who were loudly sceptical as to the existence of the rangers, and the most prominent of these was a young man who was perched on a barrel in the centre of the room, and was evidently one of the leading spirits in the community. We have already seen that dark curling hair, lack-lustre eye, and thin cruel lip, in the person of Black Tom Ferguson, the rejected suitor of Miss Sinclair. He was easily distinguishable from the rest of the party by a tweed coat, and other symptoms of effeminacy in his dress, which might have brought him into disrepute had

he not, like Abe Durton's partner, early established the reputation of being a quietly desperate man. On the present occasion he seemed somewhat under the influence of liquor, a rare occurrence with him, and probably to be ascribed to his recent disappointment. He was almost fierce in his denunciation of Jim Struggles and his story.

'It's always the same,' he said; 'if a man meets a few travellers in the bush, he's bound to come back raving about rangers. If they'd seen Struggles there, they would have gone off with a long yarn about a ranger crouching behind a tree. As to recognising people riding fast among tree trunks—it is an impossibility.'

Struggles, however, stoutly maintained his original assertion, and all the sarcasms and arguments of his opponent were thrown away upon his stolid complacency. It was noticed that Ferguson seemed unaccountably put out about the whole matter. Something seemed to be on his mind, too; for occasionally he would spring off his perch and pace up and down the room with an abstracted and very forbidding look upon his swarthy face. It was a relief to every one when suddenly catching up his hat, and wishing the company a curt 'Good-night,' he walked off through the bar, and into the street beyond.

'Seems kinder put out,' remarked Long McCoy.

'He can't be afeard of the rangers, surely,' said Joe Shamus, another man of consequence, and principal shareholder of the El Dorado.

'No, he's not the man to be afraid,' answered another. 'There's something queer about him the last day or two. He's been long trips in the woods without any tools. They do say that the assay-

er's daughter has chucked him over.'

'Quite right too. A darned sight too good for him,' remarked several voices.

'It's odds but he has another try,' said Shamus. 'He's a hard man to beat when he's set his mind on a thing.'

'Abe Durton's the horse to win,' remarked Houlahan, a little bearded Irishman. 'It's sivin to four I'd be willin' to lay on him.'

'And you'd be afther losing your money, a-vich,' said a young man with a laugh. 'She'll want more brains than ever Bones had in his skull, you bet.'

'Who's seen Bones to-day?' asked McCoy.

'I've seen him,' said the young miner. 'He came round all through the camp asking for a dictionary—wanted to write a letter likely.'

'I saw him readin' it,' said Shamus. 'He came over to me an' told me he'd struck something good at the first show. Showed me a word about as long as your arm—"abdicate," or something.'

'It's a rich man he is now, I suppose,' said the Irishman.

'Well, he's about made his pile. He holds a hundred feet of the Conemara, and the shares go up every hour. If he'd sell out he'd be about fit to go home.'

'Guess he wants to take somebody home with him,' said another. 'Old Joshua wouldn't object, seein' that the money is there.'

I think it has been already recorded in this narrative that Jim Struggles, the wandering prospector, had gained the reputation of being the wit of the camp. It was not only in airy badinage, but in the conception and execution of more pretentious practical pleasantries that Jim had earned his reputation. His adventure in the

morning had caused a certain stagnation in his usual flow of humour; but the company and his potations were gradually restoring him to a more cheerful state of mind. He had been brooding in silence over some idea since the departure of Ferguson, and he now proceeded to evolve it to his expectant companions.

'Say, boys,' he began. 'What day's this?'

'Friday, ain't it?'

'No, not that. What day of the month?'

'Darned if I know!'

'Well, I'll tell you now. It's the first o' April. I've got a calendar in the hut as says so.'

'What if it is?' said several voices.

'Well, don't you see, it's All Fools' day. Couldn't we fix up some little joke on some one, eh? Couldn't we get a laugh out of it? Now there's old Bones, for instance; he'll never smell a rat. Couldn't we send him off somewhere and watch him go maybe? We'd have something to chaff him on for a month to come, eh?'

There was a general murmur of assent. A joke, however poor, was always welcome to the Sluice. The broader the point, the more thoroughly was it appreciated. There was no morbid delicacy of feeling in the gulches.

'Where shall we send him?' was the query.

Jim Struggles was buried in thought for a moment. Then an unhallowed inspiration seemed to come over him, and he laughed uproariously, rubbing his hands between his knees in the excess of his delight.

'Well, what is it?' asked the eager audience.

'See here, boys. There's Miss Sinclair. You was saying as Abe's gone on her. She don't fancy him much you think. Sup-

pose we write him a note—send it him to-night, you know.'

'Well, what then?' said McCoy.

'Well, pretend the note is from her, d'ye see? Put her name at the bottom. Let on as she wants him to come up an' meet her in the garden at twelve. He's bound to go. He'll think she wants to go off with him. It'll be the biggest thing played this year.'

There was a roar of laughter. The idea conjured up of honest Bones mooning about in the garden, and of old Joshua coming out to remonstrate with a double-barrelled shot-gun, was irresistibly comic. The plan was approved of unanimously.

'Here's pencil and here's paper,' said the humorist. 'Who's goin' to write the letter?'

'Write it yourself, Jim,' said Shamus.

'Well, what shall I say?'

'Say what you think right.'

'I don't know how she'd put it,' said Jim, scratching his head in great perplexity. 'However, Bones will never know the differ. How will this do? "Dear old man. Come to the garden at twelve to-night, else I'll never speak to you again," eh?'

'No, that's not the style,' said the young miner. 'Mind, she's a lass of eddication. She'd put it kinder flowery and soft.'

'Well, write it yourself,' said Jim sulkily, handing him over the pencil.

'This is the sort of thing,' said the miner, moistening the point of it in his mouth. '"When the moon is in the sky—"'

'There it is. That's bully,' from the company.

'"And the stars a-shinin' bright, meet, O meet me, Adolphus, by the garden-gate at twelve."'

'His name ain't Adolphus,' objected a critic.

'That's how the poetry comes in,' said the miner. 'It's kinder fanciful, d'ye see. Sounds a darned sight better than Abe. Trust him for guessing who she means. I'll sign it Carrie. There!'

This epistle was gravely passed round the room from hand to hand, and reverentially gazed upon as being a remarkable production of the human brain. It was then folded up and committed to the care of a small boy, who was solemnly charged under dire threats to deliver it at the shanty, and to make off before any awkward questions were asked him. It was only after he had disappeared in the darkness that some slight compunction visited one or two of the company.

'Ain't it playing it rather low on the girl?' said Shamus.

'And rough on old Bones?' suggested another.

However, these objections were overruled by the majority, and disappeared entirely upon the appearance of a second jorum of whisky. The matter had almost been forgotten by the time that Abe had received his note, and was spelling it out with a palpitating heart under the light of his solitary candle.

That night has long been remembered in Harvey's Sluice. A fitful breeze was sweeping down from the distant mountains, moaning and sighing among the deserted claims. Dark clouds were hurrying across the moon, one moment throwing a shadow over the landscape, and the next allowing the silvery radiance to shine down, cold and clear, upon the little valley, and bathe in a weird mysterious light the great stretch of bushland on either side of it. A great loneliness seemed to rest on

the face of Nature. Men remarked afterwards on the strange eerie atmosphere which hung over the little town.

It was in the darkness that Abe Durton sallied out from his little shanty. His partner, Boss Morgan, was still absent in the bush, so that beyond the ever-watchful Blinky there was no living being to observe his movements. A feeling of mild surprise filled his simple soul that his angel's delicate fingers could have formed those great straggling hieroglyphics; however, there was the name at the foot, and that was enough for him. She wanted him, no matter for what, and with a heart as pure and as heroic as any knight-errant, this rough miner went forth at the summons of his love.

He groped his way up the steep winding track which led to Azalea Villa. There was a little clump of small trees and shrubs about fifty yards from the entrance of the garden. Abe stopped for a moment when he had reached them in order to collect himself. It was hardly twelve yet, so that he had a few minutes to spare. He stood under their dark canopy peering at the white house vaguely outlined in front of him. A plain enough little dwelling-place to any prosaic mortal, but girt with reverence and awe in the eyes of the lover.

The miner paused under the shade of the trees, and then moved on to the garden-gate. There was no one there. He was evidently rather early. The moon was shining brightly now, and the country round was as clear as day. Abe looked past the little villa at the road which ran like a white winding streak over the brow of the hill. A watcher behind could have seen his square athletic figure standing out sharp and

clear. Then he gave a start as if he had been shot, and staggered up against the little gate beside him.

He had seen something which caused even his sunburned face to become a shade paler as he thought of the girl so near him. Just at the bend of the road, not two hundred yards away, he saw a dark moving mass coming round the curve, and lost in the shadow of the hill. It was but for a moment; yet in that moment the quick perception of the practised woodman had realised the whole situation. It was a band of horsemen bound for the villa; and what horsemen would ride so by night save the terror of the woodlands—the dreaded rangers of the bush?

It is true that on ordinary occasions Abe was as sluggish in his intellect as he was heavy in his movements. In the hour of danger, however, he was as remarkable for cool deliberation as for prompt and decisive action. As he advanced up the garden he rapidly reckoned up the chances against him. There were half a dozen of the assailants at the most moderate computation, all desperate and fearless men. The question was whether he could keep them at bay for a short time and prevent their forcing a passage into the house. We have already mentioned that sentinels had been placed in the main street of the town. Abe reckoned that help would be at hand within ten minutes of the firing of the first shot.

Were he inside the house he could confidently reckon on holding his own for a longer period than that. Before he could rouse the sleepers and gain admission, however, the rangers would be upon him. He must content himself with doing his utmost. At

any rate he would show Carrie that if he could not talk to her he could at least die for her. The thought gave him quite a glow of pleasure, as he crept under the shadow of the house. He cocked his revolver. Experience had taught him the advantage of the first shot.

The road along which the rangers were coming ended at a wooden gate opening into the upper part of the assayer's little garden. This gate had a high acacia hedge on either side of it, and opened into a short walk also lined by impassable thorny walls. Abe knew the place well. One resolute man might, he thought, hold the passage for a few minutes until the assailants broke through elsewhere and took him in the rear. At any rate, it was his best chance. He passed the front door, but forbore to give any alarm. Sinclair was an elderly man, and would be of little assistance in such a desperate struggle as was before him, and the appearance of lights in the house would warn the rangers of the resistance awaiting them. O for his partner the Boss, for Chicago Bill, for any one of twenty gallant men who would have come at his call and stood by him in such a quarrel! He turned into the narrow pathway. There was the well-remembered wooden gate; and there, perched upon the gate, languidly swinging his legs backwards and forwards, and peering down the road in front of him, was Mr. John Morgan, the very man for whom Abe had been longing from the bottom of his heart.

There was short time for explanations. A few hurried words announced that the Boss, returning from his little tour, had come across the rangers riding on their mission of darkness, and overhearing their destination, had

managed by hard running and knowledge of the country to arrive before them. 'No time to alarm any one,' he explained, still panting from his exertions; 'must stop them ourselves—not come for swag—come for your girl. Only over our bodies, Bones;' and with these few broken words the strangely assorted friends shook hands and looked lovingly into each other's eyes, while the tramp of the horses came down to them on the fragrant breeze of the woods.

There were six rangers in all. One who appeared to be leader rode in front, while the others followed in a body. They flung themselves off their horses when they were opposite the house, and after a few muttered words from their captain, tethered the animals to a small tree, and walked confidently towards the gate.

Boss Morgan and Abe were crouching down under the shadow of the hedge, at the extreme end of the narrow passage. They were invisible to the rangers, who evidently reckoned (on meeting little resistance in this isolated house. As the first man came forwards and half turned to give some order to his comrades both the friends recognised the stern profile and heavy moustache of Black Ferguson, the rejected suitor of Miss Carrie Sinclair. Honest Abe made a mental vow that he at least should never reach the door alive.

The ruffian stepped up to the gate and put his hand upon the latch. He started as a stentorian 'Stand back!' came thundering out from among the bushes. In war, as in love, the miner was a man of few words.

'There's no road this way,' explained another voice with an infinite sadness and gentleness about it which was characteristic

of its owner when the devil was rampant in his soul. The ranger recognised it. He remembered the soft languid address which he had listened to in the billiard-room of the Buckhurst Arms, and which had wound up by the mild orator putting his back against the door, drawing a derringer, and asking to see the sharper who would dare to force a passage. 'It's that infernal fool Durton,' he said, 'and his white-faced friend.'

Both were well-known names in the country round. But the rangers were reckless and desperate men. They drew up to the gate in a body.

'Clear out of that!' said their leader in a grim whisper; 'you can't save the girl. Go off with whole skins while you have the chance.'

The partners laughed.

'Then curse you, come on!'

The gate was flung open and the party fired a struggling volley, and made a fierce rush towards the gravelled walk.

The revolvers cracked merrily in the silence of the night from the bushes at the other end. It was hard to aim with precision in the darkness. The second man sprang convulsively into the air, and fell upon his face with his arms extended, writhing horribly in the moonlight. The third was grazed in the leg and stopped. The others stopped out of sympathy. After all, the girl was not for them, and their heart was hardly in the work. Their captain rushed madly on, like a valiant blackguard as he was, but was met by a crashing blow from the butt of Abe Durton's pistol, delivered with a fierce energy which sent him reeling back among his comrades with the blood streaming from his shattered jaw, and his capacity

for cursing cut short at the very moment when he needed to draw upon it most.

'Don't go yet,' said the voice in the darkness.

However, they had no intention of going yet. A few minutes must elapse, they knew, before Harvey's Sluice could be upon them. There was still time to force the door if they could succeed in mastering the defenders. What Abe had feared came to pass. Black Ferguson knew the ground as well as he did. He ran rapidly along the hedge, and the five crashed through it where there was some appearance of a gap. The two friends glanced at each other. Their flank was turned. They stood up like men who knew their fate and did not fear to meet it.

There was a wild medley of dark figures in the moonlight, and a ringing cheer from well-known voices. The humorists of Harvey's Sluice had found something even more practical than the joke which they had come to witness. The partners saw the faces of friends beside them—Shamus, Struggles, M'Coy. There was a desperate rally, a sweeping fiery rush, a cloud of smoke, with pistol-shots and fierce oaths ringing out of it, and when it lifted, a single dark shadow flying for dear life to the shelter of the broken hedge was the only ranger upon his feet within the little garden. But there was no sound of triumph among the victors; a strange hush had come over them, and a murmur as of grief—for there, lying across the threshold which he had fought so gallantly to defend, lay poor Abe, the loyal and simple hearted, breathing heavily with a bullet through his lungs.

He was carried inside with all the rough tenderness of the mines.

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There were men there, I think, who would have borne his hurt to have had the love of that white girlish figure, which bent over the blood-stained bed and whispered so softly and so tenderly in his ear. Her voice seemed to rouse him. He opened his dreamy blue eyes and looked about him. They rested on her face.

'Played out,' he murmured; 'pardon, Carrie, morib—' and with a faint smile he sank back upon the pillow.

However, Abe failed for once to be as good as his word. His hardy constitution asserted itself, and he shook off what might in a weaker man have proved a deadly wound. Whether it was the balmy air of the woodlands which came sweeping over a thousand miles of forest into the sick man's room, or whether it was the little nurse who tended him so gently, certain it is that within two months we heard that he had realised his shares in the Cone-mara, and gone from Harvey's Sluice and the little shanty upon the hill for ever.

I had the advantage a short time afterwards of seeing an extract from the letter of a young lady named Amelia, to whom we have made a casual allusion in the course of our narrative. We have already broken the privacy of one feminine epistle, so we shall have fewer scruples in glancing at another. 'I was bridesmaid,' she remarks, 'and Carrie looked charming' (underlined) 'in the veil and orange blossoms. Such a man, he is, twice as big as your Jack, and he was so funny, and blushed, and dropped the prayer-book. And when they asked the question you could have heard him roar "I do!" at the other end of George-street. His best man was a darling' (twice underlined). 'So quiet and hand-

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some and nice. Too gentle to take care of himself among those rough men, I am sure.' I think it quite possible that in the fullness of time Miss Amelia managed to take upon herself the care of our old friend Mr. Jack Morgan, commonly known as the Boss.

A tree is still pointed out at the bend as Ferguson's gum-tree. There is no need to enter into unsavoury details. Justice is short and sharp in primitive colonies, and the dwellers in Harvey's Sluice were a serious and practical race.

It is still the custom for a select party to meet on a Saturday evening in the snugery of the Colonial Bar. On such occasions,

if there be a stranger or guest to be entertained, the same solemn ceremony is always observed. Glasses are charged in silence; there is a tapping of the same upon the table, and then, with a deprecating cough, Jim Struggles comes forward and tells the tale of the April joke, and of what came of it. There is generally conceded to be something very artistic in the way in which he breaks off suddenly at the close of his narrative by waving his bumper in the air with 'An' here's to Mr. and Mrs. Bones. God bless 'em!' a sentiment in which the stranger, if he be a prudent man, will most cordially acquiesce.

A. CONAN DOYLE, M.B.

THE JASMINE WREATH

(*'COJO JASMIN Y CLAVEL'*).

Freely translated from the Spanish of Don Manuel del Rio.

JASMINE with gilly-flow'rs I wreathe,
My lips his name oft fondly breathe.

O crimson gilly-flow'rets sweet,
O'er which the wanton zephyrs blow,
Bright tokens my true love to greet,
Tell him e'en thus my heart doth glow!
O jasmine, pure as virgin snow,
Thy sweetest perfumes o'er him breathe,
Say, like thy petals I am pale,
And, yearning, ever weep and wail—
Jasmine with gilly-flow'rs I wreathe.

A thousand blossoms, gemmed with dew,
Now 'neath the vernal sun are born,
All rich in perfume, gay of hue—
Alas! their beauty will be gone
Ere doth arise another morn!
Tell me, my fragrant jasmine-wreath,
Tell me, O gilly-flow'rets red,
Is Love's bloom, too, so quickly shed?
My lips his name oft fondly breathe!

BARONESS SWIFT.

LONDON SOCIETY.

MAY 1882.

OUR DERBY SWEEPSTAKES.

‘BOB!’ I shouted.

No answer.

‘Bob?’

A rapid crescendo of snores ending in a prolonged gasp.

‘Wake up, Bob!’

‘What the deuce is the row?’ said a very sleepy voice.

‘It’s nearly breakfast-time,’ I explained.

‘Bother breakfast-time!’ said the rebellious spirit in the bed.

‘And here’s a letter, Bob,’ said I.

‘Why on earth couldn’t you say so at once? Come on with it;’ on which cordial invitation I marched into my brother’s room, and perched myself upon the side of his bed.

‘Here you are,’ said I: ‘Indian stamp—Brindisi postmark. Who is it from?’

‘Mind your own business, Stumpy,’ said my brother, as he pushed back his curly tangled locks, and, after rubbing his eyes, proceeded to break the seal. Now if there is one appellation for which above all others I have a profound contempt, it is this one of ‘Stumpy.’ Some miserable nurse, impressed by the relative proportions of my round grave face and little mottled legs, had dubbed me with the odious nickname in the days of my childhood. I am not really a bit more stumpy than any other girl of

seventeen. On the present occasion I rose in all the dignity of wrath, and was about to dump my brother on the head with the pillow by way of remonstrance, when a look of interest in his face stopped me.

‘Who do you think is coming, Nelly?’ he said. ‘An old friend of yours.’

‘What! from India? Not Jack Hawthorne?’

‘Even so,’ said Bob. ‘Jack is coming back and going to stay with us. He says he will be here almost as soon as his letter. Now don’t dance about like that. You’ll knock down the guns, or do some damage. Keep quiet like a good girl, and sit down here again.’ Bob spoke with all the weight of the two-and-twenty summers which had passed over his towsy head, so I calmed down and settled into my former position.

‘Won’t it be jolly?’ I cried. ‘But, Bob, the last time he was here he was a boy, and now he is a man. He won’t be the same Jack at all.’

‘Well, for that matter,’ said Bob, ‘you were only a girl then—a nasty little girl with ringlets, while now—’

‘What now?’ I asked.

Bob seemed actually on the eve of paying me a compliment.

‘Well, you haven’t got the ringlets, and you are ever so

much bigger, you see, and nastier.'

Brothers are a blessing for one thing. There is no possibility of any young lady getting unreasonably conceited if she be endowed with them.

I think they were all glad at breakfast-time to hear of Jack Hawthorne's promised advent. By 'all' I mean my mother and Elsie and Bob. Our cousin Solomon Barker looked anything but overjoyed when I made the announcement in breathless triumph. I never thought of it before, but perhaps that young man is getting fond of Elsie, and is afraid of a rival; otherwise I don't see why such a simple thing should have caused him to push away his egg, and declare that he had done famously, in an aggressive manner which at once threw doubt upon his proposition. Grace Maberly, Elsie's friend, seemed quietly contented, as is her wont.

As for me, I was in a riotous state of delight. Jack and I had been children together. He was like an elder brother to me until he became a cadet and left us. How often Bob and he had climbed old Brown's apple-trees, while I stood beneath and collected the spoil in my little white pinafore! There was hardly a scrape or adventure which I could remember in which Jack did not figure as a prominent character. But he was 'Lieutenant' Hawthorne now, had been through the Afghan War, and was, as Bob said, 'quite the warrior.' What ever would he look like? Somehow the 'warrior' had conjured up an idea of Jack in full armour with plumes on his head, thirsting for blood, and hewing at somebody with an enormous sword. After doing that sort of thing I was afraid he would never descend to romps

and charades and the other stock amusements of Hatherley House.

Cousin Sol was certainly out of spirits during the next few days. He could be hardly persuaded to make a fourth at lawn-tennis, but showed an extraordinary love of solitude and strong tobacco. We used to come across him in the most unexpected places, in the shrubbery and down by the river, on which occasions, if there was any possibility of avoiding us, he would gaze rigidly into the distance, and utterly ignore feminine shouts and the waving of parasols. It was certainly very rude of him. I got hold of him one evening before dinner, and drawing myself up to my full height of five feet four and a half inches, I proceeded to give him a piece of my mind, a process which Bob characterises as the height of charity, since it consists in my giving away what I am most in need of myself.

Cousin Sol was lounging in a rocking-chair with the *Times* before him, gazing moodily over the top of it into the fire. I ranged up alongside and poured in my broadside.

'We seem to have given you some offence, Mr. Barker,' I remarked, with lofty courtesy.

'What do you mean, Nell?' asked my cousin, looking up at me in surprise. He had a very curious way of looking at me, had cousin Sol.

'You appear to have dropped our acquaintance,' I remarked; and then suddenly descending from my heroics, 'You *are* stupid, Sol! What's been the matter with you?'

'Nothing, Nell. At least, nothing of any consequence. You know my medical examination is in two months, and I am reading for it.'

'O,' said I, in a bristle of indignation, 'if that's it, there's no

more to be said. Of course if you prefer bones to your female relations, it's all right. There are young men who would rather make themselves agreeable than mope in corners and learn how to prod people with knives.' With which epitome of the noble science of surgery I proceeded to straighten some refractory antimacassars with unnecessary violence.

I could see Sol looking with an amused smile at the angry little blue-eyed figure in front of him. 'Don't blow me up, Nell,' he said; 'I have been plucked once, you know. Besides,' looking grave, 'you'll have amusement enough when this—what is his name?—Lieutenant Hawthorne comes.'

'Jack won't go and associate with mummies and skeletons, at any rate,' I remarked.

'Do you always call him Jack?' asked the student.

'Of course I do. John sounds so stiff.'

'O, it does, does it?' said my companion doubtfully.

I still had my theory about Elsie running in my head. I thought I might try and set the matter in a more cheerful light. Sol had got up, and was staring out of the open window. I went over to him and glanced up timidly into his usually good-humoured face, which was now looking very dark and discontented. He was a shy man as a rule, but I thought that with a little leading he might be brought to confess.

'You're a jealous old thing,' I remarked.

The young man coloured and looked down at me.

'I know your secret,' said I boldly.

'What secret?' said he, colouring even more.

'Never you mind. I know it. Let me tell you this,' I added,

getting bolder: 'that Jack and Elsie never got on very well. There is far more chance of Jack's falling in love with me. We were always friends.'

If I had stuck the knitting-needle which I held in my hand into cousin Sol he could not have given a greater jump. 'Good heavens!' he said, and I could see his dark eyes staring at me through the twilight. 'Do you really think that it is your sister that I care for?'

'Certainly,' said I stoutly, with a feeling that I was nailing my colours to the mast.

Never did a single word produce such an effect. Cousin Sol wheeled round with a gasp of astonishment, and sprang right out of the window. He always had curious ways of expressing his feelings, but this one struck me as being so entirely original that I was utterly bereft of any idea save that of wonder. I stood staring out into the gathering darkness. Then there appeared looking in at me from the lawn a very much abashed and still rather astonished face. 'It's you I care for, Nell,' said the face, and at once vanished, while I heard the noise of somebody running at the top of his speed down the avenue. He certainly was a most extraordinary young man.

Things went on very much the same at Hatherley House in spite of cousin Sol's characteristic declaration of affection. He never sounded me as to my sentiments in regard to him, nor did he allude to the matter for several days. He evidently thought that he had done all which was needed in such cases. He used to discompose me dreadfully at times, however, by coming and planting himself opposite me, and staring at me with a stony rigidity which was absolutely appalling.

‘Don’t do that, Sol,’ I said to him one day; ‘you give me the creeps all over.’

‘Why do I give you the creeps, Nelly?’ said he. ‘Don’t you like me?’

‘O yes, I like you well enough,’ said I. ‘I like Lord Nelson, for that matter; but I shouldn’t like his monument to come and stare at me by the hour. It makes me feel quite all-overish.’

‘What on earth put Lord Nelson into your head?’ said my cousin.

‘I’m sure I don’t know.’

‘Do you like me the same way you like Lord Nelson, Nell?’

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘only more.’ With which small ray of encouragement poor Sol had to be content, as Elsie and Miss Maberley came rustling into the room and put an end to our *tête-à-tête*.

I certainly did like my cousin. I knew what a simple true nature lay beneath his quiet exterior. The idea of having Sol Barker for a lover, however—Sol, whose very name was synonymous with bashfulness—was too incredible. Why couldn’t he fall in love with Grace or with Elsie? They might have known what to do with him; they were older than I, and could encourage him, or snub him, as they thought best. Gracie, however, was carrying on a mild flirtation with my brother Bob, and Elsie seemed utterly unconscious of the whole matter. I have one characteristic recollection of my cousin which I cannot help introducing here, though it has nothing to do with the thread of the narrative. It was on the occasion of his first visit to Hatherley House. The wife of the Rector called one day, and the responsibility of entertaining her rested with Sol and myself. We got on very well at first. Sol was unusually lively and talkative. Unfortunately a hospitable

impulse came upon him; and in spite of many warning nods and winks, he asked the visitor if he might offer her a glass of wine. Now, as ill-luck would have it, our supply had just been finished, and though we had written to London, a fresh consignment had not yet arrived. I listened breathlessly for the answer, trusting she would refuse; but to my horror she accepted with alacrity. ‘Never mind ringing, Nell,’ said Sol, ‘I’ll act as butler;’ and with a confident smile he marched into the little cupboard in which the decanters were usually kept. It was not until he was well in that he suddenly recollected having heard us mention in the morning that there was none in the house. His mental anguish was so great that he spent the remainder of Mrs. Salter’s visit in the cupboard, utterly refusing to come out until after her departure. Had there been any possibility of the wine-press having another egress, or leading anywhere, matters would not have been so bad; but I knew that old Mrs. Salter was as well up in the geography of the house as I was myself. She stayed for three-quarters of an hour waiting for Sol’s reappearance, and then went away in high dudgeon. ‘My dear,’ she said, recounting the incident to her husband, and breaking into semi-scriptural language in the violence of her indignation, ‘the cupboard seemed to open and swallow him!’

‘Jack is coming down by the two o’clock train,’ said Bob one morning, coming in to breakfast with a telegram in his hand.

I could see Sol looking at me reproachfully; but that did not prevent me from showing my delight at the intelligence.

‘We’ll have awful fun when

he comes,' said Bob. 'We'll drag the fish-pond, and have no end of a lark. Won't it be jolly, Sol?'

Sol's opinion of its jollity was evidently too great to be expressed in words; for he gave an inarticulate grunt as answer.

I had a long cogitation on the subject of Jack in the garden that morning. After all, I was becoming a big girl, as Bob had forcibly reminded me. I must be circumspect in my conduct now. A real live man had actually looked upon me with the eyes of love. It was all very well when I was a child to have Jack following me about and kissing me; but I must keep him at a distance now. I remembered how he presented me with a dead fish once which he had taken out of the Hatherley Brook, and how I treasured it up among my most precious possessions, until an insidious odour in the house had caused the mother to send an abusive letter to Mr. Burton, who had pronounced our drainage to be all that could be desired. I must learn to be formal and distant. I pictured our meeting to myself, and went through a rehearsal of it. The holly-bush represented Jack, and I approached it solemnly, made it a stately curtsy, and held out my hand with, 'So glad to see you, Lieutenant Hawthorne!' Elsie came out while I was doing it, but made no remark. I heard her ask Sol at luncheon, however, whether idiocy generally ran in families, or was simply confined to individuals; at which poor Sol blushed furiously, and became utterly incoherent in his attempts at an explanation.

Our farmyard opens upon the avenue about half-way between Hatherley House and the lodge. Sol and I and Mr. Nicholas Cronin, the son of a neighbour-

ing squire, went down there after lunch. This imposing demonstration was for the purpose of quelling a mutiny which had broken out in the henhouse. The earliest tidings of the rising had been conveyed to the House by young Bayliss, son and heir of the henkeeper, and my presence had been urgently requested. Let me remark in parenthesis that fowls were my special department in domestic economy, and that no step was ever taken in their management without my advice and assistance. Old Bayliss hobbled out upon our arrival, and informed us of the full extent of the disturbance. It seems that the crested hen and the Bantam cock had developed such length of wing that they were enabled to fly over into the park; and that the example of these ringleaders had been so contagious, that even such steady old matrons as the bandy-legged Cochin China had developed roving propensities, and pushed their way into forbidden ground. A council of war was held in the yard, and it was unanimously decided that the wings of the recalcitrants must be clipped.

What a scamper we had! By 'we' I mean Mr. Cronin and myself; while cousin Sol hovered about in the background with the scissors, and cheered us on. The two culprits clearly knew that they were wanted; for they rushed under the hayricks and over the coops, until there seemed to be at least half a dozen crested hens and Bantam cocks dodging about in the yard. The other hens were mildly interested in the proceedings, and contented themselves with an occasional derisive cluck, with the exception of the favourite wife of the Bantam, who abused us roundly from the top of the coop. The ducks were the most aggravating por-

tion of the community; for though they had nothing to do with the original disturbance, they took a warm interest in the fugitives, waddling behind them as fast as their little yellow legs would carry them, and getting in the way of the pursuers.

'We have it!' I gasped, as the crested hen was driven into a corner. 'Catch it, Mr. Cronin! O, you've missed it! you've missed it! Get in the way, Sol. O dear, it's coming to me!'

'Well done, Miss Montague!' cried Mr. Cronin, as I seized the wretched fowl by the leg as it fluttered past me, and proceeded to tuck it under my arm to prevent any possibility of escape. 'Let me carry it for you.'

'No, no; I want you to catch the cock. There it goes! There—behind the hayrick. You go to one side, and I'll go to the other.'

'It's going through the gate!' shouted Sol.

'Shoo!' cried I. 'Shoo! O, it's gone!' and we both made a dart into the park in pursuit, tore round the corner into the avenue, and there I found myself face to face with a sunburned young man in a tweed suit, who was lounging along in the direction of the House.

There was no mistaking those laughing gray eyes, though I think if I had never looked at him some instinct would have told me that it was Jack. How could I be dignified with the crested hen tucked under my arm? I tried to pull myself up; but the miserable bird seemed to think that it had found a protector at last, for it began to cluck with redoubled vehemence. I had to give it up in despair, and burst into a laugh, while Jack did the same.

'How are you, Nell?' he said, holding out his hand; and then

in an astonished voice, 'Why, you're not a bit the same as when I saw you last!'

'Well, I hadn't a hen under my arm then,' said I.

'Who would have thought that little Nell would have developed into a woman?' said Jack, still lost in amazement.

'You didn't expect me to develop into a man, did you?' said I in high indignation; and then, suddenly dropping all reserve, 'We're awfully glad you've come, Jack. Never mind going up to the House. Come and help us to catch that Bantam cock.'

'Right you are,' said Jack in his old cheery way, still keeping his eyes firmly fixed upon my countenance. 'Come on!' and away the three of us scampered across the park, with poor Sol aiding and abetting with the scissors and the prisoner in the rear. Jack was a very crumpled-looking visitor by the time he paid his respects to the mother that afternoon, and my dreams of dignity and reserve were scattered to the winds.

We had quite a party at Hatherley House that May. There were Bob, and Sol, and Jack Hawthorne, and Mr. Nicholas Cronin; then there were Miss Maberley, and Elsie, and mother, and myself. On an emergency we could always muster half a dozen visitors from the houses round, so as to have an audience when charades or private theatricals were attempted. Mr. Cronin, an easy-going athletic young Oxford man, proved to be a great acquisition, having wonderful powers of organisation and execution. Jack was not nearly as lively as he used to be, in fact we unanimously accused him of being in love; at which he looked as silly as young men usually do on such occasions,

but did not attempt to deny the soft impeachment.

'What shall we do to-day?' said Bob one morning. 'Can anybody make a suggestion?'

'Drag the pond,' said Mr. Cronin.

'Haven't men enough,' said Bob; 'anything else?'

'We must get up a sweepstakes for the Derby,' remarked Jack.

'O, there's plenty of time for that. It isn't run till the week after next. Anything else?'

'Lawn-tennis,' said Sol dubiously.

'Bother lawn-tennis!'

'You might make a picnic to Hatherley Abbey,' said I.

'Capital!' cried Mr. Cronin. 'The very thing. What do you think, Bob?'

'First class,' said my brother, grasping eagerly at the idea. Picnics are very dear to those who are in the first stage of the tender passion.

'Well, how are we to go, Nell?' asked Elsie.

'I won't go at all,' said I; 'I'd like to awfully, but I have to plant those ferns Sol got me. You had better walk. It is only three miles, and young Bayliss can be sent over with the basket of provisions.'

'You'll come, Jack?' said Bob.

Here was another impediment. The Lieutenant had twisted his ankle yesterday. He had not mentioned it to any one at the time; but it was beginning to pain him now.

'Couldn't do it, really,' said Jack. 'Three miles there and three back!'

'Come on. Don't be lazy,' said Bob.

'My dear fellow,' answered the Lieutenant, 'I have had walking enough to last me the rest of my life. If you had seen how that energetic general of ours' bustled

me along from Cabul to Candahar, you'd sympathise with me.'

'Leave the veteran alone,' said Mr. Nicholas Cronin.

'Pity the war-worn soldier,' remarked Bob.

'None of your chaff,' said Jack. 'I'll tell you what I'll do,' he added, brightening up. 'You let me have the trap, Bob, and I'll drive over with Nell as soon as she has finished planting her ferns. We can take the basket with us. You'll come, won't you, Nell?'

'All right,' said I. And Bob having given his assent to the arrangement, and everybody being pleased, except Mr. Solomon Barker, who glared with mild malignancy at the soldier, the matter was finally settled, and the whole party proceeded to get ready, and finally departed down the avenue.

It was an extraordinary thing how that ankle improved after the last of the troop had passed round the curve of the hedge. By the time the ferns were planted and the gig got ready Jack was as active and lively as ever he was in his life.

'You seem to have got better very suddenly,' I remarked, as we drove down the narrow winding country lane.

'Yes,' said Jack. 'The fact is, Nell, there never was anything the matter with me. I wanted to have a talk with you.'

'You don't mean to say you would tell a lie in order to have a talk with me?' I remonstrated.

'Forty,' said Jack stoutly.

I was too lost in contemplation of the depths of guile in Jack's nature to make any further remark. I wondered whether Elsie would be flattered or indignant were any one to offer to tell so many lies in her behalf.

'We used to be good friends

when we were children, Nell,' remarked my companion.

'Yes,' said I, looking down at the rug which was thrown over my knees. I was beginning to be quite an experienced young lady by this time, you see, and to understand certain inflections of the masculine voice, which are only to be acquired by practice.

'You don't seem to care for me now as much as you did then,' said Jack.

I was still intensely absorbed in the leopard's skin in front of me.

'Do you know, Nelly,' continued Jack, 'that when I have been camping out in the frozen passes of the Himalayas, when I have seen the hostile array in front of me; in fact,' suddenly dropping into bathos, 'all the time I was in that beastly hole Afghanistan, I used to think of the little girl I had left in England.'

'Indeed!' I murmured.

'Yes,' said Jack, 'I bore the memory of you in my heart, and then when I came back you were a little girl no longer. I found you a beautiful woman, Nelly, and I wondered whether you had forgotten the days that were gone.'

Jack was becoming quite poetical in his enthusiasm. By this time he had left the old bay pony entirely to its own devices, and it was indulging in its chronic propensity of stopping and admiring the view.

'Look here, Nelly,' said Jack, with a gasp like a man who is about to pull the string of his shower-bath, 'one of the things you learn in campaigning is to secure a good thing whenever you see it. Never delay or hesitate, for you never know that some other fellow may not carry it off while you are making up your mind.'

'It's coming now,' I thought in despair, 'and there's no window for Jack to escape by after he has made the plunge.' I had gradually got to associate the ideas of love and jumping out of windows, ever since poor Sol's confession.

'Do you think, Nell,' said Jack, 'that you could ever care for me enough to share my lot for ever? could you ever be my wife, Nell?'

He didn't even jump out of the trap. He sat there beside me, looking at me with his eager gray eyes, while the pony strolled along, cropping the wild flowers on either side of the road. It was quite evident that he intended having an answer. Somehow as I looked down I seemed to see a pale shy face looking in at me from a dark background, and to hear Sol's voice as he declared his love. Poor fellow! he was first in the field at any rate.

'Could you, Nell?' asked Jack once more.

'I like you very much, Jack,' said I, looking up at him nervously; 'but'—how his face changed at that monosyllable!—'I don't think I like you enough for that. Besides, I'm so young, you know. I suppose I ought to be very much complimented and that sort of thing by your offer; but you mustn't think of me in that light any more.'

'You refuse me, then?' said Jack, turning a little white.

'Why don't you go and ask Elsie?' cried I in despair. 'Why should you all come to me?'

'I don't want Elsie,' cried Jack, giving the pony a cut with his whip which rather astonished that easy-going quadruped. 'What do you mean by "all," Nell?'

No answer.

'I see how it is,' said Jack bitterly; 'I've noticed how that cousin of yours has been hanging

round you ever since I have been here. You are engaged to him.'

'No, I'm not,' said I.

'Thank God for that!' responded Jack devoutly. 'There is some hope yet. Perhaps you will come to think better of it in time. Tell me, Nelly, are you fond of that fool of a medical student?'

'He isn't a fool,' said I indignantly, 'and I am quite as fond of him as I shall ever be of you.'

'You might not care for him much and still be that,' said Jack sulkily; and neither of us spoke again until a joint bellow from Bob and Mr. Cronin announced the presence of the rest of the company.

If the picnic was a success, it was entirely due to the exertions of the latter gentleman. Three lovers out of four was an undue proportion, and it took all his convivial powers to make up for the shortcomings of the rest. Bob seemed entirely absorbed in Miss Maberley's charms, poor Elsie was left out in the cold, while my two admirers spent their time in glaring alternately at me and at each other. Mr. Cronin, however, fought gallantly against the depression, making himself agreeable to all, and exploring ruins or drawing corks with equal vehemence and energy.

Cousin Sol was particularly disheartened and out of spirits. He thought, no doubt, that my solitary ride with Jack had been a prearranged thing between us. There was more sorrow than anger in his eyes, however, while Jack, I regret to say, was decidedly ill-tempered. It was this fact which made me choose out my cousin as my companion in the ramble through the woods which succeeded our lunch. Jack had been assuming a provoking air of proprietorship lately, which I was determined to quash once for all.

I felt angry with him, too, for appearing to consider himself ill used at my refusal, and for trying to disparage poor Sol behind his back. I was far from loving either the one or the other, but somehow my girlish ideas of fair play revolted at either of them taking what I considered an unfair advantage. I felt that if Jack had not come I should, in the fulness of time, have ended by accepting my cousin; on the other hand, if it had not been for Sol, I might never have refused Jack. At present I was too fond of them both to favour either. 'How in the world is it to end?' thought I. I must do something decisive one way or the other; or perhaps the best thing would be to wait and see what the future might bring forth.

Sol seemed mildly surprised at my having selected him as my companion, but accepted the offer with a grateful smile. His mind seemed to have been vastly relieved.

'So I haven't lost you yet, Nell,' he murmured, as we branched off among the great tree-trunks and heard the voices of the party growing fainter in the distance.

'Nobody can lose me,' said I, 'for nobody has won me yet. For goodness' sake don't talk about it any more. Why can't you talk like your old self two years ago, and not be so dreadfully sentimental?'

'You'll know why some day, Nell,' said the student reproachfully. 'Wait until you are in love yourself, and you will understand it.'

I gave a little incredulous sniff.

'Sit here, Nell,' said cousin Sol, manœuvring me into a little bank of wild strawberries and mosses, and perching himself upon a stump of a tree beside me. 'Now all I ask you to do is to answer one or two questions,

and I'll never bother you any more.'

I sat resignedly, with my hands in my lap.

'Are you engaged to Lieutenant Hawthorne?'

'No!' said I energetically.

'Are you fonder of him than of me?'

'No, I'm not.'

Sol's thermometer of happiness up to a hundred in the shade at the least.

'Are you fonder of me than of him, Nelly?' in a very tender voice.

'No.'

Thermometer down below zero again.

'Do you mean to say that we are exactly equal in your eyes?'

'Yes.'

'But you must choose between us some time, you know,' said cousin Sol with mild reproach in his voice.

'I do wish you wouldn't bother me so!' I cried, getting angry, as women usually do when they are in the wrong. 'You don't care for me much or you wouldn't plague me. I believe the two of you will drive me mad between you.'

Here there were symptoms of sobs on my part, and utter consternation and defeat among the Barker faction.

'Can't you see how it is, Sol?' said I, laughing through my tears at his woe-begone appearance. 'Suppose you were brought up with two girls and had got to like them both very much, but had never preferred one to the other and never dreamed of marrying either, and then all of a sudden you are told you must choose one, and so make the other very unhappy, you wouldn't find it an easy thing to do, would you?'

'I suppose not,' said the student.

'Then you can't blame me.'

'I don't blame you, Nelly,' he answered, attacking a great purple toadstool with his stick. 'I think you are quite right to be sure of your own mind. It seems to me,' he continued, speaking rather gaspily, but saying his mind like the true English gentleman that he was, 'it seems to me that Hawthorne is an excellent fellow. He has seen more of the world than I have, and always does and says the right thing in the right place, which certainly isn't one of my characteristics. Then he is well born and has good prospects. I think I should be very grateful to you for your hesitation, Nell, and look upon it as a sign of your good-heartedness.'

'We won't talk about it any more,' said I, thinking in my heart what a very much finer fellow he was than the man he was praising. 'Look here, my jacket is all stained with horrid fungi and things. We'd better go after the rest of the party, hadn't we? I wonder where they are by this time?'

It didn't take very long to find that out. At first we heard shouting and laughter coming echoing through the long glades, and then, as we made our way in that direction, we were astonished to meet the usually phlegmatic Elsie careering through the wood at the very top of her speed, her hat off, and her hair streaming in the wind. My first idea was that some frightful catastrophe had occurred—brigands possibly, or a mad dog—and I saw my companion's big hand close round his stick; but on meeting the fugitive it proved to be nothing more tragic than a game of hide-and-seek which the indefatigable Mr. Cronin had organised. What fun we had, crouching and running and dodging among the Hatherley oaks! and how horrified the prim old abbot who planted them

would have been, and the long series of black-coated brethren who have muttered their orisons beneath the welcome shade! Jack refused to play on the excuse of his weak ankle, and lay smoking under a tree in high dudgeon, glaring in a baleful and gloomy fashion at Mr. Solomon Barker; while the latter gentleman entered enthusiastically into the game, and distinguished himself by always getting caught, and never by any possibility catching anybody else.

Poor Jack! He was certainly unfortunate that day. Even an accepted lover would have been rather put out, I think, by an incident which occurred during our return home. It was agreed that all of us should walk, as the trap had been already sent off with the empty basket, so we started down Thorny Lane and through the fields. We were just getting over a stile to cross old Brown's ten-acre lot, when Mr. Cronin pulled up, and remarked that he thought we had better get into the road.

'Road?' said Jack. 'Nonsense! We save a quarter of a mile by the field.'

'Yes, but it's rather dangerous. We'd better go round.'

'Where's the danger?' said our military man, contemptuously twisting his moustache.

'O, nothing,' said Cronin. 'That quadruped in the middle of the field is a bull, and not a very good-tempered one either. That's all. I don't think that the ladies should be allowed to go.'

'We won't go,' said the ladies in chorus.

'Then come round by the hedge and get into the road,' suggested Sol.

'You may go as you like,' said Jack rather testily; 'but I am going across the field.'

'Don't be a fool, Jack,' said my brother.

'You fellows may think it right to turn tail at an old cow, but I don't. It hurts my self-respect, you see, so I shall join you at the other side of the farm.' With which speech Jack buttoned up his coat in a truculent manner, waved his cane jauntily, and swaggered off into the ten-acre lot.

We clustered about the stile and watched the proceedings with anxiety. Jack tried to look as if he were entirely absorbed in the view and in the probable state of the weather, for he gazed about him and up into the clouds in an abstracted manner. His gaze generally began and ended, however, somewhere in the direction of the bull. That animal, after regarding the intruder with a prolonged stare, had retreated into the shadow of the hedge at one side, while Jack was walking up the long axis of the field.

'It's all right,' said I. 'It's got out of his way.'

'I think it's leading him on,' said Mr. Nicholas Cronin. 'It's a vicious cunning brute.'

Mr. Cronin had hardly spoken before the bull emerged from the hedge, and began pawing the ground, and tossing its wicked black head in the air. Jack was in the middle of the field by this time, and affected to take no notice of his companion, though he quickened his pace slightly. The bull's next manœuvre was to run rapidly round in two or three small circles; and then it suddenly stopped, bellowed, put down its head, elevated its tail, and made for Jack at the very top of its speed.

There was no use pretending to ignore its existence any longer. Jack faced round and gazed at it for a moment. He had only his

little cane in his hand to oppose to the half ton of irate beef which was charging towards him. He did the only thing that was possible, namely to make for the hedge at the other side of the field.

At first Jack hardly condescended to run, but went off with a languid contemptuous trot, a sort of compromise between his dignity and his fear, which was so ludicrous that, frightened as we were, we burst into a chorus of laughter. By degrees, however, as he heard the galloping of hoofs sounding nearer and nearer, he quickened his pace, until ultimately he was in full flight for shelter, with his hat gone and his coat-tails fluttering in the breeze, while his pursuer was not ten yards behind him. If all Ayoub Khan's cavalry had been in his rear, our Afghan hero could not have done the distance in a shorter time. Quickly as he went, the bull went quicker still, and the two seemed to gain the hedge almost at the same moment. We saw Jack spring boldly into it, and the next moment he came flying out at the other side as if he had been discharged from a cannon, while the bull indulged in a series of triumphant bellows through the hole which he had made. It was a relief to us all to see Jack gather himself up and start off for home without a glance in our direction. He had retired to his room by the time we arrived, and did not appear until breakfast next morning, when he limped in with a very crestfallen expression. None of us was hard-hearted enough to allude to the subject, however, and by judicious treatment we restored him before lunch-time to his usual state of equanimity.

It was a couple of days after the picnic that our great Derby

sweepstakes was to come off. This was an annual ceremony never omitted at Hatherley House, where, between visitors and neighbours, there were generally quite as many candidates for tickets as there were horses entered.

'The sweepstakes, ladies and gentlemen, comes off to-night,' said Bob in his character of head of the house. 'The subscription is ten shillings. Second gets quarter of the pool, and third has his money returned. No one is allowed to have more than one ticket, or to sell his ticket after drawing it. The drawing will be at seven thirty.' All of which Bob delivered in a very pompous and official voice, though the effect was rather impaired by a sonorous 'Amen!' from Mr. Nicholas Cronin.

I must now drop the personal style of narrative for a time. Hitherto my little story has consisted simply in a series of extracts from my own private journal; but now I have to tell of a scene which only came to my ears after many months.

Lieutenant Hawthorne, or Jack, as I cannot help calling him, had been very quiet since the day of the picnic, and given himself up to reverie. Now, as luck would have it, Mr. Solomon Barker sauntered into the smoking-room after luncheon on the day of the sweepstakes, and found the Lieutenant puffing moodily in solitary grandeur upon one of the settees. It would have seemed cowardly to retreat, so the student sat down in silence, and began turning over the pages of the *Graphic*. Both the rivals felt the situation to be an awkward one. They had been in the habit of studiously avoiding each other's society, and now they found themselves thrown together suddenly, with no third

person to act as a buffer. The silence began to be oppressive. The Lieutenant yawned and coughed with over-acted nonchalance, while honest Sol felt very hot and uncomfortable, and continued to stare gloomily at the paper in his hand. The ticking of the clock, and the click of the billiard-balls across the passage, seemed to grow unendurably loud and monotonous. Sol glanced across once; but catching his companion's eye in an exactly similar action, the two young men seemed simultaneously to take a deep and all-absorbing interest in the pattern of the cornice.

'Why should I quarrel with him?' thought Sol to himself. 'After all, I want nothing but fair play. Probably I shall be snubbed; but I may as well give him an opening.'

Sol's cigar had gone out; the opportunity was too good to be neglected.

'Could you oblige me with a fusee, Lieutenant?' he asked.

The Lieutenant was sorry—extremely sorry—but he was not in possession of a fusee.

This was a bad beginning. Chilly politeness was even more repulsing than absolute rudeness. But Mr. Solomon Barker, like many other shy men, was audacity itself when the ice had once been broken. He would have no more bickerings or misunderstandings. Now was the time to come to some definite arrangement. He pulled his armchair across the room, and planted himself in front of the astonished soldier.

'You're in love with Miss Nelly Montague,' he remarked.

Jack sprang off the settee with as much rapidity as if Farmer Brown's bull were coming in through the window.

'And if I am, sir,' he said, twist-

ing his tawny moustache, 'what the devil is that to you?'

'Don't lose your temper,' said Sol. 'Sit down again, and talk the matter over like a reasonable Christian. I am in love with her too.'

'What the deuce is the fellow driving at?' thought Jack, as he resumed his seat, still simmering after his recent explosion.

'So the long and the short of it is that we are both in love with her,' continued Sol, emphasising his remarks with his bony forefinger.

'What then?' said the Lieutenant, showing some symptoms of a relapse. 'I suppose that the best man will win, and that the young lady is quite able to choose for herself. You don't expect me to stand out of the race just because you happen to want the prize, do you?'

'That's just it,' cried Sol. 'One of us will have to stand out. You've hit the right idea there. You see, Nelly—Miss Montague, I mean—is, as far as I can see, rather fonder of you than of me, but still fond enough of me not to wish to grieve me by a positive refusal.'

'Honesty compels me to state,' said Jack, in a more conciliatory voice than he had made use of hitherto, 'that Nelly—Miss Montague, I mean—is rather fonder of *you* than of me; but still, as you say, fond enough of me not to prefer my rival openly in my presence.'

'I don't think you're right,' said the student. 'In fact I know you are not; for she told me as much with her own lips. However, what you say makes it easier for us to come to an understanding. It is quite evident that as long as we show ourselves to be equally fond of her, neither of us can have the slightest hope of winning her.'

'There's some sense in that,' said the Lieutenant reflectively; 'but what do you propose?'

'I propose that one of us stand out, to use your own expression. There is no alternative.'

'But who is to stand out?' asked Jack.

'Ah, that is the question.'

'I can claim to having known her longest.'

'I can claim to having loved her first.'

Matters seemed to have come to a deadlock. Neither of the young men was in the least inclined to abdicate in favour of his rival.

'Look here,' said the student, 'let us decide the matter by lot.'

This seemed fair, and was agreed to by both. A new difficulty arose, however. Both of them felt sentimental objections towards risking their angel upon such a paltry chance as the turn of a coin or the length of a straw. It was at this crisis that an inspiration came upon Lieutenant Hawthorne.

'I'll tell you how we will decide it,' he said. 'You and I are both entered for our Derby sweepstakes. If your horse beats mine, I give up my chance; if mine beats yours, you leave Miss Montague for ever. Is it a bargain?'

'I have only one stipulation to make,' said Sol. 'It is ten days yet before the race will be run. During that time neither of us must attempt to take an unfair advantage of the other. We shall both agree not to press our suit until the matter is decided.'

'Done!' said the soldier.

'Done!' said Solomon.

And they shook hands upon the agreement.

I had, as I have already observed, no knowledge of the con-

versation which had taken place between my suitors. I may mention incidentally that during the course of it I was in the library, listening to Tennyson, read aloud in the deep musical voice of Mr. Nicholas Cronin. I observed, however, in the evening that these two young men seemed remarkably excited about their horses, and that neither of them was in the least inclined to make himself agreeable to me, for which crime I am happy to say that they were both punished by drawing rank outsiders. Eurydice, I think, was the name of Sol's; while Jack's was Bicycle. Mr. Cronin drew an American horse named Iroquois, and all the others seemed fairly well pleased. I peeped into the smoking-room before going to bed, and was amused to see Jack consulting the sporting prophet of the *Field*, while Sol was deeply immersed in the *Gazette*. This sudden mania for the Turf seemed all the more strange, since I knew that if my cousin could distinguish a horse from a cow, it was as much as any of his friends would give him credit for.

The ten succeeding days were voted very slow by various members of the household. I cannot say that I found them so. Perhaps that was because I discovered something very unexpected and pleasing in the course of that period. It was a relief to be free of any fear of wounding the susceptibilities of either of my former lovers. I could say what I chose and do what I liked now; for they had deserted me completely, and handed me over to the society of my brother Bob and Mr. Nicholas Cronin. The new excitement of horse-racing seemed to have driven their former passion completely out of their minds. Never was a house

so deluged with special tips and every vile print which could by any possibility have a word bearing upon the training of the horses or their antecedents. The very grooms in the stable were tired of recounting how Bicycle was descended from Velocipede, or explaining to the anxious medical student how Eurydice was by Orpheus out of Hades. One of them discovered that her maternal grandmother had come in third for the Ebor Handicap; but the curious way in which he stuck the half crown which he received into his left eye, while he winked at the coachman with his right, throws some doubt upon the veracity of his statement. As he remarked in a beery whisper that evening, 'The bloke'll never know the differ, and it's worth 'arf a dollar for him to think as it's true.'

As the day drew nearer the excitement increased. Mr. Cronin and I used to glance across at each other and smile as Jack and Sol precipitated themselves upon the papers at breakfast, and devoured the list of the betting. But matters culminated upon the evening immediately preceding the race. The Lieutenant had run down to the station to secure the latest intelligence, and now he came rushing in, waving a crushed paper frantically over his head.

'Eurydice is scratched!' he yelled. 'Your horse is done for, Barker!'

'What!' roared Sol.

'Done for—utterly broken down in training—won't run at all!'

'Let me see,' groaned my cousin, seizing the paper; and then, dropping it, he rushed out of the room, and banged down the stairs, taking four at a time. We saw no more of him until late at night, when he slunk in, looking very

dishevelled, and crept quietly off to his room. Poor fellow, I should have condoled with him had it not been for his recent disloyal conduct towards myself.

Jack seemed a changed man from that moment. He began at once to pay me marked attention, very much to the annoyance of myself and of some one else in the room. He played and sang and proposed round games, and, in fact, quite usurped the *rôle* usually played by Mr. Nicholas Cronin.

I remember that it struck me as remarkable that on the morning of the Derby-day the Lieutenant should have entirely lost his interest in the race. He was in the greatest spirits at breakfast, but did not even open the paper in front of him. It was Mr. Cronin who unfolded it at last and glanced over its columns.

'What's the news, Nick?' asked my brother Bob.

'Nothing much. O yes, here's something. Another railway accident. Collision apparently. Westinghouse brake gone wrong. Two killed, seven hurt, and—by Jove! listen to this: "Among the victims was one of the competitors in the equine Olympiad of to-day. A sharp splinter had penetrated its side, and the valuable animal had to be sacrificed upon the shrine of humanity. The name of the horse is Bicycle." Hullo, you've gone and spilt your coffee all over the cloth, Hawthorne! Ah, I forgot, Bicycle was your horse, wasn't it? Your chance is gone, I am afraid. I see that Iroquois, who started low, has come to be first favourite now.'

Ominous words, reader, as no doubt your nice discernment has taught you during, at the least, the last three columns. Don't call me a flirt and a coquette until

you have weighed the facts. Consider my pique at the sudden desertion of my admirers, think of my delight at the confession from a man whom I had tried to conceal from myself even that I loved, think of the opportunities which he enjoyed during the time that Jack and Sol were systematically avoiding me, in accordance with their ridiculous agreement. Weigh all this, and then which among you will throw the first stone at the blushing little prize of the Derby Sweep?

Here it is as it appeared at the end of three short months in the *Morning Post*: 'August 12th.—At Hatherley Church, Nicholas Cronin, Esq., eldest son of Nicholas Cronin, Esq., of the Woodlands, Cropshire, to Miss Eleanor Montague, daughter of the late James Montague, Esq., J.P., of Hatherley House.'

Jack set off with the declared intention of volunteering for a ballooning expedition to the North Pole. He came back, however, in three days, and said that he had changed his mind, but intended to walk in Stanley's footsteps across Equatorial Africa.

Since then he has dropped one or two gloomy allusions to forlorn hopes and the unutterable joys of death; but on the whole he is coming round very nicely, and has been heard to grumble of late on such occasions as the under-doing of the mutton and the over-doing of the beef, which may be fairly set down as a very healthy symptom.

Sol took it more quietly, but I fear the iron went deeper into his soul. However, he pulled himself together like a dear brave fellow as he is, and actually had the hardihood to propose the bridesmaids, on which occasion he became inextricably mixed up in a labyrinth of words. He washed his hands of the mutinous sentence, however, and resumed his seat in the middle of it, overwhelmed with blushes and applause. I hear that he has confided his woes and his disappointments to Grace Maberley's sister, and met with the sympathy which he expected. Bob and Gracie are to be married in a few months, so possibly there may be another wedding about that time.

A. CONAN DOYLE, M.B.

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A BLIND MAN'S NOTIONS ABOUT GHOSTS.

By W. W. FENN,

AUTHOR OF 'HALF-HOURS OF BLIND MAN'S HOLIDAY,' ETC.

'I dreamt, my lady came and found me
dead,
Strange dream! that gives a dead man
leave to think.'

Now I am often tempted to
alter Romeo's words, and read,

'Strange dream! that gives a blind man
leave to see;'

for it will surprise no one to hear that in my dreams I see as plainly now as before my infirmity overtook me. Yet, conscious that I am blind, I still behold in my sleep people and places with whom and with which I was once familiar. Yet, knowing I cannot see, I still see; and without any surprise at this odd contradiction. This is only one more proof that of all the marvellous phenomena of life, dreaming is, perhaps, the most marvellous.

'Strange state of being; for 'tis still to be:
Senseless, to feel, and with sealed eyes
to see.'

Thus much can be truly said for us all; but, remembering that my eyes are always sealed, in one way the marvel is increased; for sleeping or waking, I live, as it were, in a world of dreams, never, of course, seeing anything in either state through the medium of the optic nerve. The difference, con-

sequently, between the sleeping and the waking state is, in this respect, not so marked as might at first be expected; for, unless by an effort I remind myself that I am blind, I see my friend, after a fashion, while I am broad awake and talking to him, nearly as vividly as I should do at times in a dream; the fact that in reality I cannot see him in either state being scarcely more present to me in one than in the other. Indeed, in accordance with the perversity of dreams generally, I seem to be more intuitively conscious of my deprivation of sight whilst dreaming than at any other time, although, as I have hinted, the knowledge of the strange anomaly inspires no wonder; whereas, naturally it does when, being awake, I remind myself of my infirmity. Until I do this, however, the familiar voice, the mere peculiar touch of the hand, is sufficient to bring the personality of my friend instantly before me. I mean I have a visual image of him, not necessarily in his exact likeness (that could hardly be; for perhaps he is one whose acquaintance I have made since the curtain fell), but an image, an entity, a being with eyes, nose,

and mouth, like the rest of us; not distinct in form of feature, colour of hair, and the rest, but still sufficiently so in some general way to become physiologically identified with the man I know, to stand for me as the presentment of that man; and each friend I have known since my blindness offers to me some special presentment. And this image, vague, indefinite, as it may be, starts into my presence the moment my friend opens his lips; and thus he will appear the same blurred, indefinable, but still perfectly recognisable and unmistakable being when I chance to dream of him. Nay, when I do dream of him he often becomes endowed with more definite personal characteristics; and thus the image in the dream becomes so far more real than that person's image whilst talking to him when awake. With those, however, whom I have known in earlier days, and can remember clearly, the illusion is, of course, more complete, and, as it were, stronger in a dream than when they are with me in my waking hours. When one of these speaks to me, there he at once stands out before me as he used to do. Time has made no ravages with him; and unconsciously I behold not only his features, but his expression—the kindling eye, the dilating nostril, the cheery smiling lips. These are all apparently visible. Yet, let me but pull myself up for a moment, and say, 'Where is this creature?' and lo, he has but little more substantiality than when I encounter him in my sleep, perhaps not so much. Being but an air-drawn vision, a phantom of the mind, an image imprinted only on what I may call the retina of my mind in both cases, he has more visible existence in my slumbers than anywhere else. Hence, I am inclined to urge, in

a much more literal sense than the expression is generally used, the life of a person who has become blind is but a dream. Literally he is, or his existence is, 'such stuff as dreams are made on, and his little life is rounded with a sleep.' Of course I refer to visual images.

I have often been asked to set down as clearly as I can some of my ideas on these points, and to describe the sensations I have in dreaming; and while I am complying I am led into a few speculations as to what are called ghostly apparitions, because I am inclined to think that no people see so many ghosts as the blind. If I have made myself clear in what I have written above, it can be understood that all that is ever visible to the blind, all that their mind's eye can ever compass or conjure up, must be ghostly, 'like the baseless fabric of a vision,' fading, ever fading, and yet being ever renewed. They, too, being mortal, like the rest, are influenced, but in a greater degree, by what we hear spoken of as the inner life of a man. Now the blind exist exclusively—I mean so far as visual images are concerned—in an inner life, the outer darkness throwing them eternally in upon themselves; seeing by the light that is within them, not, perhaps, always introspectively, but—I had almost written materially, positively—their very surroundings are, as it were, in themselves, because what they know of their surroundings is inwardly or self evolved. Their room, or, which is the same thing to them, the aspect of it, is only within themselves, entirely a mental picture. Lacking sight, the most superior sense, they draw but the merest suspicion from without of what really is, what really exists; for their touch, their smell, their hearing,

give them but a hint; the substantiality is created by themselves, in their own especial and peculiar manufactory, lying deep in the remotest recesses of their consciousness. The hardness of the wall, the softness of the pillow, the smoothness of satin, the roughness of frieze, the harshness or the contrary of a voice, the sweetness of the rose, or pungency of the pipe, are but so many crude bits of raw material, out of which the blind, within themselves, build up the actual presentment of the substantiality; and this being so, much of the very aspect of these substantialities must depend on the medium, on the action of the machinery through which the slight materials of which it is composed pass in the process of manufacture; and ere it is realised as a complete whole in the mind of the manufacturer, or, in other words, the look of the substantiality, reality, embodiment—call it what we will—must depend on the temperament and character of the blind builder. As with other men, upon his temperament will depend his conception of his environment and the general circumstances of his existence. By his temperament, as with other men, they will be shaped and coloured; and still, as with other men, upon his interpretation of them must depend the amount of pleasure and happiness he will get out of his life; only that, unlike other men, his actual conception of his surroundings cannot be definite. At the best, they must be phantasmic, and consequently more open to misinterpretation and more liable to change. Then, again, he still being mortal, has his moods, attributable perhaps to health, perhaps to a varying temper, which will modify, alter, twist, exaggerate, contort, as the case may be.

Granting, then, that these, roughly speaking, are necessarily some of the conditions upon which a blind man is condemned to pass through the world, is it not just possible that the man happily possessed of all his faculties and being of a favourable temperament, that is, nervous, sensitive, highly imaginative, and, of course, still subject to the influence of health: is it not possible, I say, that such an one, who declares that he has seen a ghost or has experienced some strange vision or presentment, of which a distinct vision was a part, has been for the moment either dreaming, as the blind dream, or, being awake, has seen as the blind see?—the blind, to whom all is but a vision, and to whom all their fellow-creatures are merely ghosts. I do not know, but it seems to me that hosts of nervous, sensitive, imaginative people, and those who are often what we call absent, dreamy, thoughtful mooners, may be overtaken at times by some condition which is akin to that of blindness. They withdraw themselves so entirely within themselves as to be utterly unconscious of the precise nature of their surroundings, making no use, for the time, of their optic nerve; they live in a world of their own, just as the blind do, constructing it and peopling it, as the blind do, from their inner consciousness and previously acquired knowledge; a dream-world, in short, in which 'all things are possible.'

I may be told there is nothing new in this, and that everybody is aware that this state is common among the seeing; but I believe that it is of far greater intensity in some cases than is supposed; and it is this very intensity—just this very reality of the unreality—which makes the temporary visionary world, which some see-

ing people create for themselves within themselves, exactly like the world of ghosts and spectres, dreams and phantasms, in which the blind, perforce, perpetually dwell.

We hear of marvellous ghost stories, more or less well authenticated; and some time ago one of our newspapers teemed with records of ghostly personal experiences, any one of which almost might serve to illustrate my notion. But without selecting any special one, let us take the gist of what a certain class of these point to—the commonest class—that is, where some beloved one, far away, appears, so to speak, *in propria persona*, and in more or less substantial form, of course to the intense astonishment and terror—to use the mildest term—of the witness. Later on it is discovered that this beloved one has at that identical moment been in great peril of his or her life, or has actually died. This, I say, is the pith of the commonest sort of ghost story, and has formed the basis of many popular traditions, novels, and dramas, that of the *Corsican Brothers* being a notable example; and, in a way, its very commonness seems to make it confirmatory of what few people doubt, viz. that the mind of one person may be under the sway of another, either through intense sympathy or love, or through a superior strength of will, and which sway is not appreciably lessened by what we understand as physical distance. Given, then, the existence of this sway in some particular case of a seeing person, and where the natural conditions are favourable to him—favourable, that is, in that he is either ordinarily or temporarily, through a low state of health, nervous and sensitive, and is, moreover, normally what is called a person who

lives in the clouds—and it shall be quite possible for him, according to my notion, to pass into a mental state entirely consonant with that of the blind. Oblivious of all facts around him, wrapped up in his own thoughts—and which, if not consciously, are, nevertheless, tending towards the absent one whom he dominates or is dominated by, or between whom and himself there exists some sort of bond—he sits brooding or is lying in bed, when, hey, presto! he suddenly thinks he sees the absent one standing before him, palpably, unmistakably, and precisely as a blind man would do in similar circumstances. Of course, the mental condition of both is not easy to define, but it is, I fancy, very much akin—much more so than we at first might think. To the blind man the presence would be a positive reality—as real, that is, as anything he ever sees; and if, in a way, the man not blind is reduced to the same position for the time, as I feel inclined to insist he is, the ghost is as much a reality to the one as to the other; at any rate, it takes the same hold, making the same impressions, and producing the same mental results. The only difference would be, when the first effect of the surprise, momentary or prolonged, had passed, the blind man would start to his feet, and, recalling himself to himself, would find the vision replaced by some common tangible objects, and the usual blank which is ever before him. The seeing one, on the contrary, pulling himself together, would, with his true sight—by the exercise of his optic nerve—dispel the vision, and find it replaced by his ordinary surroundings, a consciousness of which he would recover instantly; but he would still assert that he had seen a

ghost. And truly he has; *but he has been blind while he saw it!* His physical retina has been obscured as thoroughly as his blind brother's; but the 'mental retina' has carried the truth home to the mind of each with equal force. In each case the ghost has existed—has been created—within themselves; and if it be a verity to the blind, as I have endeavoured to show it is, why should it not be to the seeing? It has been built up out of a previously acquired knowledge of the reality, the impress of which is mysteriously, but indelibly, graven on some of those tablets of the sensations called memory, and which we carry about with us without thinking of them, because, as is said, they take up so little room. These deeply imprinted characters have leaped suddenly into a sort of definite shape and meaning, when summoned by circumstances accidentally, but imperceptibly, associated with them, and have become the ghost of their original form and substance.

With reference, however, to this previously acquired knowledge of the reality, I am of course supposing the case of a blind man who has not always been afflicted. To speak colloquially, he must not have been blind from birth, but must, of course, at some time in his life have had the opportunity of knowing, visually, what things are like; otherwise he could not form for himself any idea of the aspect of the absent one, any more than he could form any idea of colour or light, and, consequently, could not be conscious of a ghost in the sense of which I am speaking of one. Therefore, on the precise nature of his mental pictures, I do not pretend to speculate. He would have no visual images, though probably he would get an equiva-

lent ghost out of an imagined utterance of a voice, or by the fancy that his sensitive finger-tips were in contact with a familiar form. I mean that a man born blind might dream or imagine whilst awake, as vividly as when asleep (always supposing him to be of a favourable temperament), that he had heard his friend speaking to him, that he recognised his voice, and that he felt his familiar form beneath his hand as he passed it over face or figure. In this way even he would see or be conscious of a ghost, but it would be an aural, or a tactual one, or perhaps both. The mental embodiment or substance would be constructed equally, in a way, from previously acquired knowledge through the sense of hearing and feeling—knowledge acquired from what his ears or fingers had taught him, by listening to, or coming in contact with, the fellow-creatures with whom he was familiar. This, however, is a digression. I return therefore to my notion that the seeing man who beholds a ghost does so only when he is reduced, mentally, to the same level as that in which I and the rest of the blind have to pass our lives. He, just as we do, summons from the past, spectral appearances, such as are *our* daily and only companions. With the present as it positively exists in his immediate environment, he, being in a ghostly mood, has no more to do than we have. He sees simply as we see, with this advantage: that he can at will dispel his phantom troop by letting in upon them the fierce light of the actual, which we can never do. The plain fact, therefore, being in so many words that those who see ghosts are for the moment blind dreamers (whether awake or asleep is of no consequence), there is nothing very extraordinary in their sometimes

dreaming about, and therefore seeing, any one with whom their minds are linked. And if they chance so to dream and so to see a ghost on some momentous occasion, there is nothing very extraordinary in that occasion tallying at times with a crisis in the life of the absent one, for, for the moment, they are dreamers with 'sealed eyes.' It may be the coincidence in many instances alone which brings this about, but, being rather a startling one, it is not unnatural that it should be set down as supernatural. On the other hand, I do not pretend to say that it is never supernatural, or that it is not due to this mysterious link between mind and mind, and which is not affected by distance. It may be: I am not discussing this side of the question. I only am disposed to contend that the mere apparition is the air-drawn spectre created out of a previous knowledge of realities during a temporary, abnormal, mental, and physical condition, corresponding to that which is normal with the blind.

There is another way of looking at the subject from my point, and of speculating on it further by a transposition of the conditions. Just as ordinary folks possessed of their eyes must, as I assume, when they behold a ghost, be more or less reduced to a state of dream-like blindness, so may the blind be brought into a sort of ghost-seeing mood by a dream-like restoration to sight. The 'strange dream that gives a blind man leave to see' may be illustrated by a story, said to be well authenticated, of a lady, who, having lost her sight for many years, imagined suddenly that for several moments her vision had been restored to her. She was sitting with her family, whose appearance she, of course, well remembered, in her drawing-room, and with the as-

pect of which she had also been previously acquainted, when she declared with a terrified start, precisely as if she had seen a ghost, that she could see where and with whom she was sitting. She rose from her chair, and in sudden amazement exclaimed, 'Why, I can see you all plainly, as I used to do!' and covering her eyes with her hands for a moment, she had half ejaculated a thanks-giving, when she dropped back into her seat moaning out that she was blind again. Nothing would ever convince her that she had not been temporarily re-endowed with sight. But her assertion, when tested by a physical examination of her eyes by the oculist, was proved to have been, beyond all doubt, without foundation. The physical condition of her optic nerves made it absolutely impossible that her sight could ever have come back to her, even for an instant, save by a miracle. She nevertheless maintained that what she had stated was true; and nothing could ever shake her belief.

The explanation given by the oculist, with whom I have conversed, was exactly that which I should have expected. The poor lady, sitting comfortably in her easy-chair, 'with all appliances and means to boot,' had just for one second dozed, and, in that momentary sleep, had been visited by a dream of extraordinary vividness, in which her mental retina had received and conveyed to her mind an exact presentment of the scene, practically identical with that by which she was surrounded. In short, she had seen a ghost or ghosts. The phenomena of dreaming are too mysterious to allow of much useful speculation on the subject; but it is fair to assume that it was only the coincidence of her dreaming

a dream that practically corresponded in character with the reality of her environment at the moment—that it was her family she beheld, pretty much as they were in reality grouped about her—that made her imagine that her sight had been restored. Had she, instead, dreamt in that moment, however vividly, of some entirely different scene, she never could have been beguiled into the belief that her eyesight had returned. She would have accepted the vision as a vision and nothing more. The accident alone, I repeat, of her having dreamt of her family established the illusion in her mind. Whether or not the presence of those near and dear to her influenced the nature of her dream no one can say. I think it possibly did, upon the principle above alluded to of the influence of the strong mental bond of union likely to exist between people closely allied to each other by blood and affection—the ‘Corsican Brothers’ principle, in fact. Anyway, whatever it was which caused her to dream as she did—whatever it was which created in her mind the sense of seeing what she saw—the vision itself could have been naught else but a ghostly one; and it was only its intense vividness, confirmed by the literal facts which accidentally existed at the moment, that convinced her of its reality.

Now, supposing the lady had not been blind, and had had her momentary dream, and someone, observing her nod and her eyes close, had said, ‘Aunt, or mother, you are going to sleep,’ she would have indignantly rejected the aspersions upon her politeness, and would have said, as people do in similar circumstances, ‘Nonsense; I saw you all as I see you now. I have never lost sight of you for

a moment; going to sleep, indeed—absurd!’ And again, had a vision of equal vividness and brevity during a momentary doze visited the couch or chair of any one with all her senses intact; and had it chanced to consist of a scene in which figured some absent one, and who might have happened, by coincidence at that same moment, to have been going through some crisis in his fate, why the dreamer, being for the instant, according to my notion, reduced to the level of a blind person, would have declared she had seen a ghost. Roundly speaking, then, everybody and everything that we see with our ‘mind’s eye,’ when awake or asleep, partakes, I submit, so closely of the character of those apparitions which are said to be ghosts, that it is, after all, a mere question of degree in their vividness and our imaginativeness as to the effect they produce on us, or as to how much we believe in their supernatural origin. Therefore, so far from not believing in ghosts, I believe we all see them—constantly. Unless, however, some special coincidence chances to give to any vividly mind-drawn picture an especial significance, we are so accustomed to live in their midst that we take no heed of their existence. In dreamland, or in real-land, ‘with sealed eyes to see,’ is no such marvel then, when all is said and done; for, if we are but rightly attuned in mood, temperament, and disposition, we attach importance more or less great to any circumstances that coincide; and the stronger the coincidence and the larger our capacity for drawing mental pictures, the more and the stronger our belief in the so-called ghosts—the more and the stronger our inclination to attribute their appearance to the supernatural.

Not until we test their substantiality—the seeing man with his actual eyes, the blind man with his fingers—do we arrive at the truth that they are nothing but phantoms of the brain, existing merely on our mental retina,

and having nothing to do with our physical one. But, having arrived at this fact, I may say, with Prospero, ‘these our actors, as I foretold you, are all spirits, and are melted into air—into thin air.’

COUSINS.

WHITE lilies that have swayed so long beside
 A brake of roses that there comes an hour
 When the chill sculpture of the pallid flower
 With the warm passion of the rose is dyed—
 Such are these girls: the lily's grace allied
 Unto the charm breathed from the red rose bower
 Lives in their beauty, who with Nature's dower
 Of golden-knotted hair are glorified.

In soul a lily, but in heart a rose,
 Each waits for Time's best gift. Of all deeds done
 Within this world of travail they know none—
 Nothing of Hate's strange joys or Love's strange woes.
 For girls like these men die; but I suppose
 Most would, with me, prefer to live for one.

F. FRANKFORT MOORE.

THE LOST LETTER.

BY MRS. J. H. RIDDELL.

‘**THEN** I shall hear from you?’

‘Yes, one way or other. If it rested with me the matter might be settled now, but there are others to consult who may not be of my way of thinking. I *believe*, however, we shall want you; I hope we shall.’

‘And whether you do or not, I shall never forget your kindness.’

‘Pray do not speak of that. I only wish I could have proved of real service, though, perhaps, hereafter—’

‘Good-bye,’ she said, as he hesitated, scarcely knowing how to finish the sentence he had incautiously begun, a sentence intended to prophesy great things which might never come to pass.

‘Good-morning,’ he answered, amending her expression. ‘You may depend upon hearing from me within the week;’ and for an instant her hand lay in his hand, and her trustful eyes looked up into his face.

‘Thank you,’ she said softly; ‘you are very, very kind.’ And then she was gone. The chair she had occupied stood empty. A subtle sense of womanhood had departed from out the room. Adown the staircase—the old dark dingy staircase—a slight girlish figure had flitted, shrinking nervously from contact with those she met; and the editor, who had elicited such unwonted expressions of gratitude, was left alone to consider the position.

‘She certainly is *very* clever, poor little thing,’ he decided;

‘but Hammond won’t like it, that is quite certain. However, I shall do all I can for her. What a tiny creature it is, and yet how self-reliant! I wish Hammond could have seen her. He must have accepted her story.’

Which was, indeed, the very thing Mr. Hammond would not have done. Had he seen this pale-faced shabbily-dressed Bessie Dunlow he would have said, without the slightest hesitation,

‘It is of no use your bringing stories here; we have too many of them;’ and if the girl had proved persistent, as even the most timid of women will on behalf of their brain-children, he might have gone so far as to remark,

‘You can leave your manuscript if you like, but I tell you candidly I do not see the slightest chance of our accepting it.’

Authors were to be found who, even in the face of such discouragement, elected to leave their manuscripts, feeling confident that, although Mr. Hammond might have rejected nine hundred and ninety-nine novels, essays, or poems, their novel, essay, or poem would prove the one exception in the thousand.

When such a case occurred Mr. Hammond’s mode of dealing with the difficulty was simple in the extreme.

‘Jones,’ he would say, addressing a meek-looking clerk who sat in an outer office, and usually occupied himself in directing envelopes and wrappers, a mode

of passing time which, if useful, is somewhat apt to prove stupefying. 'Jones, just take this manuscript, and direct it to the address you will find enclosed. The day after to-morrow you can post it, together with a civil note, saying the "editor regrets," and so forth. And, Jones—'

'Yes, sir.'

'If the lady should call again, do not let her in on any account.'

'Very good, sir.'

'I am sure no one can consider the feelings of authors more than I do,' Mr. Hammond would then remark to his editor, Mr. Kilham, who, in the course of an experience extending over many years, had learned the great beauty and usefulness of silence.

Mr. Hammond had been, and indeed still was, a wholesale stationer in a tolerably safe way of business.

He did not manufacture paper himself, but he sold the goods of those who did; and, as his father had been engaged in the same branch of trade before him, Mr. Hammond's lines were thrown, as he vaguely phrased it, 'less or more among literary people all his life.'

According to his reading of the word 'literary,' he was quite correct. Any person who was connected directly or indirectly with the production of a book was one of the guild.

Paper-makers, paper-sellers, bookbinders, wood-engravers, printers—ay, even the printers' devils—black, saucy, and irrepressible—were all, in his estimation, members of one great army. Those he reckoned as the lowest of the rank and file were the men who provided employment for all the others.

Upon authors Mr. Hammond looked down with a naïve wholesome and refreshing contempt

too genuine even to prove offensive.

'It is the only calling,' he was wont to observe, 'upon which a man can enter without previous knowledge, training, or capital. A quire of paper, a pennyworth of ink, another pennyworth of pens! Why, there is not a coster in London who could set up in business with so small a stock. That is what brings such a lot of incapables into the trade. A fellow who can't do a simple sum in addition rushes into poetry; a woman who can't make a pudding is perfectly sure she is able to write. If a girl wants a new dress; if a curate finds his butcher pressing; if a lad desires to shirk business; if a widow is left with a large family and small means—he or she at once takes pen in hand and "dashes off"—that is the expression—dashes off a little something it is quite certain will "prove suitable." No; you need not talk to me about successful authors. If they had only turned their attention to some legitimate business, they would have been far more prosperous. I have never known an author who was easy about money matters unless his father did well before him, and left some substantial grist for the household mill behind. Why, look at my editor, Mr. Kilham; he is a case in point, if ever there was one. A man of good family, well educated, successful at Oxford—why, he started with everything in his favour! His uncle wanted him to take Orders, and would have given him an income, and eventually a living; but no, he had "conscientious scruples;" he did not "think he was fit to be a clergyman;" he had some objection to signing one of the Thirty-nine Articles, so he quarrelled with his friends, and came to London to try his fortune at

authorship. Well, he has tried his fortune, and what is the result? He is only too glad to come to me at a salary of two hundred and fifty pounds a year. Of course he makes something by his writing, but if you put the whole down at five hundred, I fancy you will be a little over the mark. Now do you call that success? Why, he might have been a bishop by now, if he had only followed his uncle's advice!

'But then, you see, I might not,' Mr. Kilham sometimes answered, when such a remark was made to him. 'After all, the profession of bishop is a very close borough.'

'Pooh, sir! don't tell me!' Mr. Hammond would rejoin. 'All the better for you if you had selected a calling closed against Dick, Tom, and Harry; miss in her teens and grandmother in her dotage. With all your cleverness, Kilham, I must say I think you know very little of the world.'

Mr. Hammond was quite right. Mr. Kilham—'my editor,' the captive of his bow and spear, the 'point' of his moral raids against authorship, the 'adornment' of tales meant to prove that literature could only be regarded as a very poor and trashy calling—knew very little indeed of the world, or he would never for a moment have imagined that Bessie Dunlow's face, voice, and manner were likely to impress his principal with the slightest idea of talent.

No one could have accused Mr. Hammond of having quiet tastes. When he took his holiday he always went to some town crammed full of visitors of the same turn of mind as himself. His house was a blaze of colour; his children were brought up to be prodigies of forwardness and knowledge; his horses lifted their

feet higher than other horses; and his wife, a large handsome woman, invariably wore bright dresses and a considerable amount of jewelry.

It was always the 'loudest' thing of the season in which Mr. Hammond believed.

The most startling picture, the most sensational book, the noisiest music, the most talked-about singer—if ever a writer received a long notice and glowing critique, that was the writer for whom his soul longed.

'We don't *make* authors here, sir,' he said one day pompously, to one who confessed that, as yet, the world was ignorant of the genius it contained in his own person. 'We don't make authors here, sir; but when they are made we are very glad to see them.'

'Made' authors, however, were not always so glad to see Mr. Hammond, who had an objection to remunerating them according to what they considered their deserts.

This was one of the difficulties Mr. Kilham had to contend against in his endeavours to make the magazine a success. That he had made it one was owing almost entirely to his own standing in the world of letters, and to a gentleness of manner which acted as an admirable buffer between Mr. Hammond and the contributors.

It is only fair, however, to state that Mr. Hammond did not share this opinion.

'If it were not for me,' he said, 'my magazine would soon be as poor a property as it was when it came into my hands.'

He had held a mortgage over it in the time of the previous proprietor; and when that individual's affairs went into bankruptcy determined to see whether he could not make it pay.

'There is nothing like management,' he delighted to assert. 'Everything in this world is management—the whole difference between success and failure is management.'

Like many another indirect self-praiser, Mr. Hammond forgot or ignored the fact that he had begun his management with a good business and a satisfactory balance at his bankers; whereas Mr. Kilham and others, who were not admirable administrators of their own, were forced to commence and wage the battle of existence destitute of such adventitious aids.

Bessie Dunlow would, in Mr. Hammond's eyes, have seemed merely a mistake. Young persons shabbily attired, and who looked as if they had never partaken of a sufficient meal, were out of his line entirely. Thick silks, good furs, stylish bonnets, well-made boots, well-fitting gloves—that was the 'proper sort of thing for a lady;' and Mr. Hammond would no more have dreamt of calling poor Bessie—in her best stuff dress, her modest hat, her cheap poor jacket—a lady than he would his own cook.

Nay, in his estimation, the cook would have ranked higher—she, at all events, was a good manager; but as for Bessie, of course it was all for lack of his favourite quality that she failed to present the appearance which might have won favour in the eyes of men.

Such as she was, however, she had found favour in the sight of Mr. Kilham. She reminded him of a young sister who had, for many a sorrowful year, been sleeping safely and quietly under the green turf in a certain churchyard far away. There was a look in her face, also, that recalled a girl, remembered even in his middle age with an aching pain at his

heart, who had been forced to marry against her will, and who died before she was twenty.

Further, she was a desolate little creature—desolate, though she had mother and brothers and sisters; and, moreover, she was gifted with that fatal dower, genius; and who should know better than Mr. Kilham what fortune that was likely to bring with it?

Her heart had fluttered out to him, and even at their first interview he gleaned all about her—all, that is to say, save the name of the remote village whence she travelled all alone to London.

'I wrote to editors and publishers till I was tired,' she explained; 'so I thought I would come and see them.'

That was it. She had saved and saved till the tiny purse held enough to enable her to adventure up to London. All the year she taught—she had been teaching ever since she was fifteen. All the money she could make in that way was needed, because her mother was delicate, her income small, the boys at school, her little sisters young.

Between the lines Mr. Kilham could read the simple pitiful story. Though Bessie only touched the features of her mother's character with the tenderest affection, this man, who had seen so much of human nature, understood Mrs. Dunlow's character as well as if he had been acquainted with it for years.

Weak, vain, selfish, unadaptable, proud of her sons and indulgent to them, fond of her daughter, but not considerate, as the father, had he lived, must have proved.

Over-worked, over-weighted—a gentleman not merely by birth, but in every instinct of his nature; honest and honourable; resolute to per-

form each duty as it came; a fond husband, a tender father, a true Christian, which last phrase, indeed, if we could always understand it aright, includes every excellent trait that so many words are often expended in endeavouring to express; ah! well, though the grief was old in so short a life as Bessie's, Mr. Kilham comprehended the wound inflicted by her father's death was still unhealed, when he saw the girl's eyes full of unshed tears—of tears she was resolute not to shed, as she spoke of how badly off they had been left, of what a struggle her mother found it to make all ends meet, even with what she, Bessie, could contribute to the common fund.

'So I thought,' finished the little maiden, who would, in Mr. Hammond's eyes, have seemed of so little account, 'that if I were able to earn anything by my writing—even twenty pounds a year—it would make all the difference.'

All the difference! Mr. Kilham heard that part of the sentence distinctly—saw the pale, anxious, pleading face, the soft hazel eyes, the hands unconsciously clasped on his table—and determined to speak, paradoxical as the phrase may seem, severely, out of mercy.

'The question is, my dear,' he said, and there was nothing offensive in the words 'my dear' as he spoke them—half a century seemed to separate the two, he looked so much older than he was, and she so much younger—'are you able to write? Whether the opinion be right or wrong, of course I am not prepared to say; but the general opinion is that ladies so young as you cannot have sufficient knowledge of the world to enable them to produce a story really worth reading.'

It was curious to see how, in

a second, the girl's cowardice changed into strength. She did not argue the point. She never thought of fencing with his statement.

'I can write, sir,' she said. 'I know I can write. If you will only look at my manuscript, you will say the same;' and she stretched out the manuscript which the editor, still unbelieving, and against all his convictions, permitted her to leave in his hands.

'I will write to you,' he said.

'Thank you. But will you promise me to read it?'

'You may depend upon my doing so.'

And then she went. Something, then inexplicable to the editor, seemed to go with her. Something as intangible to mental analysis as the passing fragrance of a violet would be in any actual crucible. Plenty of women had one time and another sat in the editor's office—women drawn from many ranks—women possessed of various individualities; and amongst such a number one more might well have seemed a very insignificant item.

Beauties and celebrities—ladies of high social standing; ladies who understood the art of dressing; ladies who were adepts at persuasion—all these and many more had come and gone, and impressed the editor, little or much, as the case might be; but Bessie Dunlow was the only one who had taken his fancy.

I use the phrase in no love sense. The interest he felt in her, the something he missed when she departed, had no touch of passion mingling.

His sentiment towards the girl was that of kindly pity—of admiring respect. She was so feminine and yet so strong, so timid and yet so brave, so fragile

and yet so full of energy, so sensible and yet so blind to the harshness of her lot; so grieved mother and brothers and sisters were destitute of many things good and desirable, so glad she was the eldest of the family and able to help, even though her help brought in so little.

As in the gloom of a winter afternoon in London he leaned back in his chair and thought about the burden this child—for to him she seemed little more—had undertaken and was carrying quite contentedly, Mr. Kilham found his fancy following her about her daily avocations.

In the bright winter mornings, when snow lay upon the ground, he could picture her walking along the country lanes to the houses where she taught. He could see her amongst her brothers and sisters making all things smoother for the delicate querulous mother, pouring out the tea, toasting the bread, stitching away in the evenings, opening her little budget of news for the amusement of the circle, copying out the parts for the choir, running off to the church for Saturday evening practice, playing the organ on Sundays (for a year past she had added to her mother's income by taking the post of organist; 'the rector has been so good to me,' she added), and, in a word, doing whatever her hands and her head found to do—this was the girl-woman he felt he could never quite forget, who had quite unconsciously shown him what a loving daughter and an affectionate sister could compass in her own person.

Domestically, Mr. Kilham was not fortunately situated. He had a delicate wife, who spent such portion of her existence as was not passed in society, in bemoan-

ing the evil fate which linked her fortune with that of a man who was 'a mere literary drudge;' he had little pleasure in his children, who were brought up by their mother to consider the best he, poor hack, could achieve—a very poor best indeed.

Here, then, was the other side of the shield presented for his view.

No man strong to labour—no male going forth to his work in the morning and returning to his rest at night—but a young girl, always turning her energies to account, week-day and Sunday doing something for those she loved, thankful to God, faithful to the helpless creatures He seemed to have confided to her care, untiring as regarded the task set her.

'And shall I murmur?' thought Mr. Kilham, contrasting his own position with that of Bessie Dunlow.

It grieves the chronicler of this little story to be obliged to state that, spite his inquiry, Mr. Kilham did murmur at the idea of having to read Bessie Dunlow's manuscript.

Had she told him she could sing, play, dance, make pastry, cut out a dress, he would have believed her; but he really could not credit that the little creature who seemed so small in every way—the pleading, modest, retiring little girl—possessed the smallest capacity for writing.

'It is some foolish love story, no doubt,' decided Mr. Kilham, as with a heavy sigh he cut the string that held together many sheets of paper.

CHAPTER II.

STILL Mr. Kilham read on, and it was no foolish love story which he perused.

'She made no mistake; she can write, and write well,' he said to himself, and then he turned back to the first page and read it all over again.

When he had finished his second perusal (the tale was short and the hand legible) he laid down the manuscript and thought.

'She ought to make her mark' thus ran his soliloquy. 'I wish I could give her the shove from shore; but I do not see how I can make an opening. Hammond would not like it. He never believes in new people—as if old writers must not have been new some time; and he hates all stories that end badly—says there is enough misery in real life, and so forth; though for my part I do not believe he knows anything about the matter. Funny sort of tale for a timid little creature like that to write, too! Wonder how she evolved it? Could not have been all out of her imagination.'

Two days after, Miss Dunlow was once again seated opposite the editor.

He had told her simply he believed she possessed genius, that he thought she ought to achieve great things, but at the same time he warned her of the difficulties she would have to encounter, and said, just in so many words,

'The road to success is not bordered with flowers.'

For answer, she said,

'I do not fear the difficulties I may have to encounter and overcome.'

'Ah! it is less in what you may meet than in all you must leave behind that the sorrow lies.'

'Each day we leave something behind,' she answered bravely;—

'even those who never gain, certainly lose.'

Mr. Kilham made no direct reply. He remained for a moment silent, then said abruptly,

'Where did you get your incidents? They never formed part and parcel of your own life, I am quite sure.'

'No. They did not in the way you mean; and yet they have almost formed part and parcel of my life, for all that.'

Bit by bit he drew the story from her. How in her holidays, or in what should have been her holidays, she 'kept up' the music of the younger members of the family at the Great House, where she came and went as she chose.

'They are all so kind to me,' said the brave little maiden. 'O, you cannot imagine how kind they are—even wanting me to dine and spend the evening, and go to picnics with them; and seeming quite vexed when I refuse.'

'And why do you refuse, little maiden?' asked the editor, having, perhaps, upon his brain those stories which find favour in the eyes of young ladies, relating to girls in like case with Bessie Dunlow, who made wonderful conquests.

'Why do I refuse?' echoed Bessie, who, poor soul, was practical in every detail of her life. 'O Mr. Kilham, cannot you understand? The people who ask me are rich, and gay, and fashionable. Where should I get dress which would be suitable to wear among ladies who have never had to consider money in all their lives? How could I spare time to go pleasuring, when the day is scarcely long enough for the work I have to do in it? How could I leave my mother and the boys, who have not a change from one year's end to another, and enjoy

myself while they were wanting me at home ?'

'I am sure, my dear, I cannot answer your questions,' answered Mr. Kilham with an amused smile, under which there lay a trace of sadness also. 'What you say seems very right and sensible, but yet I am constantly receiving manuscripts in which the heroines—girls situated for the most part just as you are situated—walk out to achieve success, clothed only in white muslin and innocence. They all marry rich commoners, or baronets at the least; book muslin invariably has the best of the battle against velvet.'

'I know the stories you mean,' remarked Bessie, laughing; 'in them the governess is preferred to the pupil, and often the maid to the mistress. But you cannot think such tales are founded upon observation. In real life, I fancy, gentlemen visitors scarcely remember there is a governess in the house.'

'At the Hall, where you "keep up" the children's music when the family comes down from London, you must have managed to observe one of the gentlemen visitors pretty closely, I should say.'

Bessie looked troubled, but she did not blush. 'Yes,' she answered, 'I could not help it—I have been so much with them—him and her, I mean.' Here she lightly touched her manuscript. 'I have seen it all. I know how she tries him, though she is so good to every one else. I know how much he has borne from her, and I am sure—O, I am sure as possible, that some day the story will end as I have it. He will go away, and then, when it is too late, she will know how fond she is of him.'

'You think she is fond of him, then ?'

'Certain. She is able to hide it from him; but she cannot hide it from me.'

And thus they talked on for a little while; and, as in a mirror, she showed him artlessly and unconsciously the home wherein the coquettish beauty dwelt when she was not in London, or abroad, or taking her pleasure at some fashionable English watering-place.

With Bessie for guide, Mr. Kilham walked adown shady alleys to the lake whereon swans sailed proudly; he passed through conservatories filled with the rarest flowers; he sauntered across the park, and rested under the branches of ancient trees; he beheld the church, situate within the grounds, decked for Christmas; and peeped into the cottages where gifts from the Hall had come.

And there was no jealousy, no heart-burning in this girl's description of the life led by another girl scarcely a year older than herself; nothing in her own lot seemed to strike Bessie as hard. That one should be high and her fellow low was all a part and parcel of the scheme of creation, and Bessie had never even thought of amending it. That she should go afoot and the beauty ride on horseback was an arrangement she did not seem to think might be altered with advantage. Here, on the one hand, was little Bessie Dunlow working hard, rising early, eating the bread of carefulness; there, on the other hand, was the beautiful heroine of her story, with scarcely a crumpled rose-leaf to trouble her peace. And yet what the little teacher desired was not any of the luxuries surrounding the spoiled beauty, but only that her heroine should listen to the dictates of her own heart, and so, as Bessie said,

'Make my story all untrue.'

'You will have to change the ending of it,' commented Mr. Kilham, 'if I am even to try to do anything with it. My principal objects *in toto* to melancholy stories, and it would not be of the slightest use asking him to insert yours as it stands.'

But here arose an unexpected difficulty. Bessie, docile enough in most things, positively refused to remodel her story at the bidding of any proprietor on earth.

'I should only spoil it,' she remarked. 'I will write you another if you like; but I could not change that.'

Quite in vain Mr. Kilham remonstrated. Bessie was firm. The indifference or adaptability which comes, say, after twenty years of authorship, is rarely met with in a novice. At that moment Miss Dunlow was possessed with something of a martyr's constancy. Her story might be rejected, but her story should not be altered; and with a sigh that proved Mr. Kilham to be conversant with the ways of women and authors, he gave up the struggle.

'I will try my best for you,' he said, with a smile, 'though you do slight my advice. If you are passing the day after to-morrow, I will tell you what the chances are.'

When Bessie called again, Mr. Kilham confessed the chances were about equal.

'I hope I shall be able to manage it for you,' he said; 'but I can promise nothing. Let me see, what is your address? I will write to you.'

Without any knowledge of the utter unfashionableness of the neighbourhood where she was lodging, Bessie gave him the name of a very obscure street situate in a district where 'nobody lived.'

'I shall only be there for a

week,' she said timidly. 'I can only stay in London for another week.'

Mr. Kilham looked in the girl's face, and understood the reason.

The slender hoard, so painfully gathered, so carefully husbanded, was wasting rapidly away.

'Had not you better return home at once,' he said kindly, 'and let me communicate with you there?'

Like many other young people, the girl was, after a fashion, obstinate.

'No,' she answered; 'for good or for evil, I have decided to abide by what I am able to do while in London. If I gain, I thank God. If I fail, I believe it to be His will.'

Pregnant words, recalled afterwards by Mr. Kilham with a wondering interrogation.

It was after them—after a pause—she spoke the sentence with which this story opens.

Adown the stream of memory there still oftentimes comes floating to the editor, now a man more than successful, the very look Bessie Dunlow's face wore as she stood in his office for the last time. He can see the earnest eyes, hear the soft pleading voice, feel the touch of the small delicate hand, and watch the slender figure as the girl, gifted with so much genius, passes out of the room and flits down the gloomy staircase into the street.

'I wish Hammond were back,' said Mr. Kilham, in conversation with himself, some few days later on. 'Time is getting on, and I should not like to accept the story without his approval.'

For Mr. Kilham was not the autocratic editor most persons imagined.

He did not pooh-pooh the suggestions of his principal, and in-

timate if Mr. Hammond found the money, that was all any one desired of him.

On the contrary, he deferred, perhaps unduly, to Mr. Hammond's opinions. He was mild and meek, and anything in the shape of warfare with his chief would have been abhorrent to his nature. He never asserted himself, never insisted upon his rights. If occasionally he felt aggrieved, and disposed to throw up his appointment, there arose before him the vision of tradespeople clamouring to be satisfied, of daughters asking for dress which could not be provided.

'A poor creature,' excepting for his learning, Mr. Hammond considered him; but spite of this opinion he was a gentleman in every habit of his life, in every instinct of his nature, and with a chivalry that was an integral part of his character he desired to help Bessie Dunlow, who was indeed as distressed a heroine as ever existed in the pages of romance.

Days went by, and still Mr. Hammond did not return. It was the very last evening before the date Bessie had fixed for leaving London, and Mr. Kilham was as far from knowing the mind of his principal as ever.

'I will risk it,' he decided. 'The tale shall appear. The story is a good one, and accepting it may, as the little girl says, "make all the difference" to her. How I should like to see her face when she receives my letter!'

But Bessie never received the letter. It was lost in transit. What became of it, who can tell? There are millions and millions of letters delivered safely, but sometimes there is one missing, one opened in the hope of finding an inclosure, one dropped by a drunken

postman, one torn up for the sake of its stamp by a precociously wicked errand lad, one slipped in the folds of a magazine or newspaper, one mislaid by a careless servant—missing, at all events. Sometimes of importance, sometimes of none.

And the letter announcing to Bessie Dunlow the fruition of her hopes never reached her, and she waited, waited for its coming till hope was dead.

She stayed till the last minute in London. Stayed two days beyond the date she had intended. Pinching, saving, almost starving, she managed to give that two days' law, and defer her departure from the Thursday till the Saturday, and leave only in time to catch the last train home at night, so as to be able to appear at her post on the Sunday morning.

She had not money enough left to pay for a cab, or even for an omnibus. In her poor little purse there lay only her railway-ticket and sixpence halfpenny. Over the 'stony-hearted streets' she walked, weak in body, crushed in mind.

She had thrown and lost, ventured her all upon this cast, and, behold, the game was over. As she rolled up her manuscripts and put them in the bottom of her bag, her soul was too sick for tears. That night—that Saturday night—as she trod the pavements, slippery from recent rain, as she passed the open doors of gin-palaces, from out of which the gas flared brightly, as with head bent down she moved sadly through the throng, turning a deaf ear to the blandishments of omnibus cads, and an unseeing eye on the men and women she met on her way, I do not think there was in the length and breadth of London a sadder heart than Bessie Dunlow's, full of sad

hearts as the great Babylon always is.

Mr. Kilham waited, expecting to see her; but, as she failed to come, wrote once again.

This time the letter reached safely; but Bessie was gone.

When Mr. Kilham at last called at the lodging she had occupied he found his note stuck in the frame of the cheap mirror over the front-parlour chimneypiece; but there was no Bessie to read it.

The little servant, her face and hands smeared with black-lead, told him all she knew about the young lady's departure.

'She went away last Saturday night, sir; and a nasty night it was for her to be out. She would not have a cab. I wanted to fetch one. She looked as if she had been crying, and seemed in a sort of despair. She gave me half-a-crown; and indeed, sir, I would rather not have taken it. No letter came for her on the Thursday or the Friday or the Saturday; I am sure of it, because she waited and watched for every post. No, sir, I don't know where her home is, and neither does missus. Missus was saying, only this morning, if she had known where she lived she would have sent that letter after her.'

The editor did what he could. Not a rich man, he inserted one or two advertisements addressed to Miss B. D., who called on such a date, at such an office; but nothing came of it. B. D. made no sign. As she had flitted down the dark staircase, so she was now departed out of his reach. She might have been dead and buried for aught of sign that she made. It was the story of Evangeline re-enacted, with a difference.

Prosperity and success had been quite close to her, and, unknowing, she left behind the sunshine,

and went out sorrowing into the night.

CHAPTER III.

It was the golden summer-time. In the country meadows were dotted with wild-flowers; water-lilies bloomed in the cool shallows of slowly-gliding rivers; on the hillsides great patches of sunshine lay warm; the sea sparkled under a clear blue sky, almost unflecked by clouds; a lovely season far away from London, but in town itself the heat was oppressive; the watered streets seemed to send up steam instead of coolness; and people resident in narrow courts and close chambers gasped, by reason of the oppressive atmosphere which seemed to grow even warmer after the sun went down, and to become almost unendurable in the watches of the night.

At his post in the old rooms, however, Mr. Kilham sat regular and industrious as ever. Life with him had, for many a year, gone on in a pretty regular and humdrum fashion. Lucky it was that he did not dislike his profession or rebel at his calling. Year in, year out, found him walking the familiar streets at given hours, opening his letters as the neighbouring clock struck ten, discharging his duties with the regularity of an automaton and the careful honesty of an honourable gentleman.

When he took his annual holiday, it either assumed the form of a week's walking tour, or otherwise a Christmas visit to a distant relative who farmed about a thousand acres of land, and was, in the opinion of Mrs. Kilham, 'an uncommonly common person.'

This especial year, however, he decided to take no holiday. His

outgoings had been larger and his incomings smaller than usual. Mrs. Kilham and family were at Scarborough, and some extra work, confided to him by a friendly publisher, would, he calculated, about enable him to send the required remittances to that fashionable seaport.

It was broiling weather, however, and he often found himself oppressed with a feeling of drowsiness and disinclination for mental exertion necessarily alarming to a man who trusts to his brain for the means of livelihood.

'This won't do,' he said to himself one afternoon, after he had been vainly striving to concentrate his attention on the proof before him. 'I must take a run out of town, if only for one night.'

At that moment a clerk entered with a bundle of letters which had arrived by the afternoon post, and Mr. Kilham, as his glance rested on them, groaned in spirit.

'Leave them down there, Jones,' he said, thinking for the moment that he would leave them unopened till the next morning.

Habit, however, proved stronger than mental disinclination for the task, and, after a few minutes, he pushed aside his proof, drew the letters towards him, and glanced over their contents, which, as a rule, seemed to be of the usual description.

Old men and maidens, young men and elderly ladies, all anxious to rush into print, all certain the editor must receive their offerings with eager hands.

But at last there was one mis-sive which he read twice, and then a third time, with eager attention. It contained the offer of a post which, if he had ever dared to hope, would have been the one good he might have desired.

It was a certainty. The duties

were light, and of a nature consonant with his tastes. The emolument might by many have been considered low, but to Mr. Kilham it seemed absolute affluence.

This good gift came from a gentleman who had known Mr. Kilham's father, and was acquainted with the abilities of his son.

'If it is worth your acceptance,' he wrote, 'I shall be more than delighted. There are several matters we ought to discuss *viva voce*, and, as I am not likely to be in town for some weeks, I venture to ask you to give us the pleasure of seeing you here. My wife will be charmed to make your acquaintance; and the carriage shall meet any train by which you are good enough to say you will come to us. I trust you can make it convenient to remain at least a week.'

In a moment the world was changed for the man who had worked so faithfully and so long. Ease of mind in the future, the relaxation he so sorely needed provided as by the wand of a magician. After long years, it had come about as such good comes in stories; but in this case it was not too late, as in stories and in life good so often does come.

How rapidly he corrected that weary proof, with what different eyes he looked over the remainder of the letters! How much better and more graceful it seemed to answer, with a certain cunning flattery, the applications of would-be labourers in the literary market!

Life seemed a pleasure instead of a toil; and it was really a different looking individual who, indulging in an unwonted extravagance, took a first-class ticket for Hardersbridge, that being the nearest station to Mr. Mayning's place in Deepshire.

Never fairer had summer

afternoon seemed to him ; never had this world seemed so full of beauty, so desirable a place to remain, as on that Saturday afternoon while the train sped away, far away from London, and the pure sweet air that had passed over miles of new-mown hay, of springing corn, and dainty wild flowers, touched his forehead with a light caressing breath.

The carriage was waiting at the station-gates and Mr. Mayning on the platform.

Behind lay the old dreary life. This was but the first taste of the beauty and luxury of an existence free from the depressing influence of sordid cares.

For that evening Mr. Kilham walked as one in a dream ; everything was strange to him, and yet he recognised an extraordinary sense of familiarity with the objects which met him at every turn.

That broad terrace, commanding a view beyond the park of low blue hills, of a winding river, of distant cottages, red-tiled and picturesque ; surely he had paced it or something just like it.

The very conservatory, the very odours of the rare plants it contained, revived in him some memory the source of which he could not at the moment trace. It was the same with his host and hostess, the same with Miss Mayning and the young man who followed her about like her shadow.

In a dream the editor went to bed. As one in a dream he threw open his window the next morning, and looked out at the prospect through a tracery of dew-spangled roses and burnished magnolia leaves.

Neither was the church unfamiliar to him. Those marble flags draping the tomb of Admiral Mayning were as accustomed to his eyes as the steps in Fountain-court. The mode of conducting

the service, the peculiarities of the vicar, the appearance of the clerk, the misbehaviour of the choir-boys, the position of the family pew—somehow and some time he must have been at Mayning before.

As they walked across the park, home, light dawned upon him.

‘How wretchedly they manage that organ!’ remarked Mrs. Mayning to her daughter. And the daughter, disentangling the fringe of a dainty parasol, replied,

‘Yes, we miss Bessie now.’

‘Have you heard how she is this morning?’ asked the elder lady.

‘Worse,’ replied Miss Mayning. And then, with a charming smile, she turned to Mr. Kilham and explained,

‘We are talking of the dearest little creature possible,’ she said, ‘who was so delightful as to manage the music at Mayning. We were quite the envy of all the parishes round and about. It was really quite a pleasure to listen to it.’

‘And the young lady—she who played the organ, I mean?’ asked Mr. Kilham, with a quick comprehension stirring his heart.

‘O, Miss Dunlow! she is dying, poor child.’ And Miss Mayning, still toying with that refractory fringe, would not show the tears which were brimming in her eyes.

‘The best girl that ever lived,’ supplemented Mrs. Mayning.

Mr. Kilham asked no further question, but, when luncheon was over, went out for a walk all by himself.

He had no difficulty in finding Mrs. Dunlow’s cottage—set back in a garden full of flowers, the windows almost covered with honeysuckle and jasmine.

In the porch Mr. Kilham met one of the boys, for whose welfare Bessie had toiled so long and so cheerfully.

'Can I see your sister?' asked the editor. 'Is she able to be down-stairs?'

'O, yes, sir!' answered the lad; and, opening a door to the right, he announced the visitor, with no more ceremony than was involved in—

'Bessie, here's a gentleman!'

She was lying on a sofa, near a pleasant window opening out upon a tiny lawn shaded by an old mulberry-tree.

Without any evidence of surprise she recognised her former friend, and held out a feeble hand in greeting.

'I thought you had quite forgotten me,' she said, with a wan pitiful smile.

'I did write, though,' he answered; and then he told her how he had tried to find her, and failed.

'Should you like the story to appear now?' he asked. 'Would it be any pleasure to you?'

Pleasure, ah! The warm colour that flushed her cheek was answer sufficient.

He remained talking with her for a little time; but when he saw she was growing weary, he rose to take his leave.

As he did so, she laid her hand gently upon his arm.

'I want to tell you,' she said; 'it does not matter about that letter at all. If it had come, things might have been different, but they could not have been better. Mr. Mayning is going to see to the boys, and he has managed to get an annuity for my mother. Everything is well with me. It seemed hard at first, but it is hard no longer.'

'Will you do me the favour of glancing over that little story, Miss Mayning?'

It was Mr. Kilham who spoke—Mr. Kilham now quite an accustomed visitor at the Hall.

The season was Christmas. Out in the hedgerows hollyberries glistened from amid the snow, which lay lightly on branch and bough and leaf. Inside the Hall there seemed a cold ice. Miss Mayning and her lover had quarrelled; she had tried his patience that 'once too often' Bessie Dunlow foresaw would be the case. He was going away, for good or for evil—for always; and Miss Mayning was wandering restlessly from drawing-room to conservatory, from conservatory to library, trying to look as if she did not care.

Mr. Kilham's seemed the strangest request, and yet it was grateful. The man who could suggest the 'glancing over a little story' must of necessity be unaware of the anguish of mind she was experiencing.

Miss Mayning took the magazine offered, and, sitting down, began to read—carelessly at first, with more earnest attention as she proceeded. When she had finished, she looked back to the commencement; that gave her no enlightenment.

'Do you happen to know who wrote this?' she asked, turning to Mr. Kilham.

'Yes,' was the answer. 'Poor little Bessie Dunlow!'

'Bessie Dunlow!' she repeated in amazement. Then his eyes and her eyes met, and she understood.

'It is a touching story,' she said, after a pause.

'All stories which reflect life are, I fancy,' was his answer; and, leaving the room, he sought the rejected lover, who was superintending the packing of his belongings.

'Miss Mayning,' said the editor, looking out of the window, 'has gone across the Park to look at Miss Dunlow's grave.'

‘Indeed!’

‘Don’t you think, before you leave, you would like to look at it also? Believe me, she was one of your truest friends.’

‘Poor, good, dear little girl!’

‘If she could speak to you now, I fancy she would ask you to pay her one last visit.’

The valet had left the room when Mr. Kilham entered; and Miss Mayning’s lover now fixed an anxious gaze upon his adviser.

‘What do you mean?’ he asked.

‘Just what I say,’ answered Mr. Kilham. ‘Bessie Dunlow always foresaw what has come to pass; but she would have given all she had to give to enable you both to understand your own hearts. If you follow Miss Mayning now, I think you need never doubt her again.’

An hour later two affianced lovers came pacing slowly back across the park.

They had paused for a minute

by the churchyard gate to look lingeringly at a modest grave covered over quite closely by the greenest and softest moss.

Hand in hand they stood, forgetting their new happiness for a moment in the contemplation of that mound, raised not many months before over the girl who had done so much, and done it so well.

‘What a pity she died!’ whispered Miss Mayning, tears gathering in her lovely eyes.

Would Bessie have said the same?

Scarcely, I imagine. If the day were short, it had been full of work; if the battle had seemed insignificant, the victory was complete. Out of the hurry, secure from jealousy, quite safe and free from all trouble she lay, her task completed, her work done—

‘With her limbs at rest in the green
earth’s breast,
And her soul at home with God.’

A CHRISTMAS CARD FROM AUSTRALIA.

A SUNBEAM taken from the plenty here,
To melt thy snows, I fain would send thee, dear;
The blue that slumbers in Australian skies
Seems but reflected from thy radiant eyes;
The flowers that blossom in the forest shade
A pathway only for thy feet seem made;
So flowers and sunbeams and blue entwine,
A message taken from my heart to thine.

Sydney, New South Wales.

PHILIP DALE
(AUTHOR OF ‘DOROTHY’).

MY FRIEND THE MURDERER.

'NUMBER 43 is no better, Doctor,' said the head-warder in a slightly reproachful accent, looking in round the corner of my door.

'Confound 43!' I responded from behind the pages of the *Australian Sketcher*.

'And 61 says his tubes are paining him. Couldn't you do anything for him?'

'He's a walking drug shop,' said I. 'He has the whole British pharmacopœia inside him. I believe his tubes are as sound as yours are.'

'Then there's 7 and 108, they are chronic,' continued the warder, glancing down a blue slip of paper. 'And 28 knocked off work yesterday—said lifting things gave him a stitch in the side. I want you to have a look at him, if you don't mind, Doctor. There's 31, too—him that killed John Adamson in the Corinthian brig—he's been carrying on awful in the night, shrieking and yelling, he has, and no stopping him neither.'

'All right, I'll have a look at him afterwards,' I said, tossing my paper carelessly aside, and pouring myself out a cup of coffee. 'Nothing else to report, I suppose, warder?'

The official protruded his head a little further into the room. 'Beg pardon, Doctor,' he said, in a confidential tone, 'but I notice as 82 has a bit of a cold, and it would be a good excuse for you to visit him and have a chat, maybe.'

The cup of coffee was arrested half-way to my lips as I stared in

amazement at the man's serious face.

'An excuse?' I said. 'An excuse? What the deuce are you talking about, McPherson? You see me trudging about all day at my practice, when I'm not looking after the prisoners, and coming back every night as tired as a dog, and you talk about finding me an excuse for doing more work.'

'You'd like it, Doctor,' said warder McPherson, insinuating one of his shoulders into the room. 'That man's story's worth listening to if you could get him to tell it, though he's not what you'd call free in his speech. Maybe you don't know who 82 is?'

'No, I don't, and I don't care either,' I answered, in the conviction that some local ruffian was about to be foisted upon me as a celebrity.

'He's Maloney,' said the warder, 'him that turned Queen's evidence after the murders at Bluemansdyke.'

'You don't say so?' I ejaculated, laying down my cup in astonishment. I had heard of this ghastly series of murders, and read an account of them in a London magazine long before setting foot in the colony. I remembered that the atrocities committed had thrown the Burke and Hare crimes completely into the shade, and that one of the most villainous of the gang had saved his own skin by betraying his companions. 'Are you sure?' I asked.

'O yes, it's him right enough. Just you draw him out a bit and he'll astonish you. He's a man to know, is Maloney; that's to say, in moderation;' and the head grinned, bobbed, and disappeared, leaving me to finish my breakfast, and ruminate over what I had heard.

The surgeonship of an Australian prison is not an enviable position. It may be endurable in Melbourne or Sydney, but the little town of Perth has few attractions to recommend it, and those few had been long exhausted. The climate was detestable, and the society far from congenial. Sheep and cattle were the staple support of the community; and their prices, breeding, and diseases the principal topic of conversation. Now as I, being an outsider, possessed neither the one nor the other, and was utterly callous to the new 'dip' and the 'rot' and other kindred topics, I found myself in a state of mental isolation, and was ready to hail anything which might relieve the monotony of my existence. Maloney, the murderer, had, at least, some distinctiveness and individuality in his character, and might act as a tonic to a mind sick of the commonplaces of existence. I determined that I should follow the warder's advice, and take the excuse for making his acquaintance. When, therefore, I went upon my usual matutinal round, I turned the lock of the door, which bore the convict's number upon it, and walked into the cell.

The man was lying in a heap upon his rough bed as I entered, but, uncoiling his long limbs, he started up and stared at me with an insolent look of defiance on his face which augured badly for our interview. He had a pale set face, with sandy hair and a

steelly-blue eye, with something feline in its expression. His frame was tall and muscular, though there was a curious bend in his shoulders, which almost amounted to a deformity. An ordinary observer, meeting him in the street, might have put him down as a well-developed man, fairly handsome, and of studious habits—even in the hideous uniform of the rottenest convict establishment he imparted a certain refinement to his carriage which marked him out among the inferior ruffians around him.

'I'm not on the sick-list,' he said gruffly. There was something in the hard rasping voice which dispelled all softer allusions, and made me realise that I was face to face with the man of the Lena Valley and Bluemansdyke, the bloodiest bushranger that ever stuck up a farm or cut the throats of its occupants.

'I know you're not,' I answered. 'Warder McPherson told me that you had a cold, though, and I thought I'd look in and see you.'

'Blast Warder McPherson, and blast you, too!' yelled the convict, in a paroxysm of rage. 'O, that's right,' he added in a quieter voice; 'hurry away; report me to the governor, do! Get me another six months or so—that's your game.'

'I'm not going to report you,' I said.

'Eight square feet of ground,' he went on, disregarding my protest, and evidently working himself into a fury again. 'Eight square feet, and I can't have that without being talked to and stared at, and—O, blast the whole crew of you!' and he raised his two clenched hands above his head and shook them in passionate invective.

'You've got a curious idea of

hospitality,' I remarked, determined not to lose my temper, and saying almost the first thing that came to my tongue.

To my surprise the words had an extraordinary effect upon him. He seemed completely staggered at my assuming the proposition for which he had been so fiercely contending, namely, that the room in which we stood was his own.

'I beg your pardon,' he said; 'I didn't mean to be rude. Won't you take a seat?' and he motioned towards a rough trestle, which formed the headpiece of his couch.

I sat down rather astonished at the sudden change. I don't know that I liked Maloney better under his new aspect. The murderer had, it is true, disappeared for the nonce, but there was something in the smooth tones and obsequious manner which powerfully suggested the witness of the Queen, who had stood up and sworn away the lives of his companions in crime.

'How's your chest?' I asked, putting on my professional air.

'Come, drop it, Doctor, drop it!' he answered, showing a row of white teeth, as he resumed his seat upon the side of the bed. 'It wasn't anxiety after my precious health that brought you along here; that story won't wash at all. You came to have a look at Wolf Tone Maloney, forger, murderer, Sidney-slyder, ranger, and Government peach. That's about my figure, ain't it? There it is, plain and straight; there's nothing mean about me.'

He paused as if he expected me to say something; but, as I remained silent, he repeated once or twice, 'There's nothing mean about me.'

'And why shouldn't I?' he suddenly yelled, his eyes gleaming and his whole satanic nature re-

asserting itself. 'We were bound to swing, one and all, and they were none the worse if I saved myself by turning against them. Every man for himself, say I, and the devil take the luckiest. You haven't a plug of tobacco, Doctor, have you?'

He tore at the piece of 'Barrett's' which I handed him, as ravenously as a wild beast. It seemed to have the effect of soothing his nerves, for he settled himself down in the bed, and reassumed his former deprecating manner.

'You wouldn't like it yourself, you know, Doctor,' he said; 'it's enough to make any man a little queer in his temper. I'm in for six months this time for assault, and very sorry I shall be to go out again, I can tell you. My mind's at ease in here; but when I'm outside, what with the Government, and what with Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury, there's no chance of a quiet life.'

'Who is he?' I asked.

'He's the brother of John Grimthorpe; the same that was condemned on my evidence, and an infernal scamp he was, too! Spawn of the devil, both of them! This tattooed one is a murderous ruffian, and he swore to have my blood after that trial. It's seven year ago, and he's following me yet; I know he is, though he lies low and keeps dark. He came up to me in Ballarat in '75; you can see on the back of my hand here where the bullet clipped me. He tried again in '76, at Port Phillip, but I got the drop on him and wounded him badly. He knifed me in '79 though, in a bar at Adelaide, and that made our account about level. He's loafing round again now, and he'll let daylight into me—unless—unless by some extraordinary chance some one does as much for him.' And Maloney gave a very ugly smile.

'I don't complain of *him* so much,' he continued. 'Looking at it in his way, no doubt it is a sort of family matter that can hardly be neglected. It's the Government that fetches me. When I think of what I've done for this country, and then of what this country has done for me, it makes me fairly wild—clean drives me off my head. There's no gratitude nor common decency left, Doctor!'

He brooded over his wrongs for a few minutes, and then proceeded to lay them before me in detail.

'Here's nine men,' he said, 'they've been murdering and killing for a matter of three years, and maybe a life a week wouldn't more than average the work that they've done. The Government catches them and the Government tries them, but they can't convict; and why?—because the witnesses have all had their throats cut, and the whole job's been very neatly done. What happens then? Up comes a citizen called Wolf Tone Maloney; he says, "The country needs me, and here I am." And with that he gives his evidence, convicts the lot, and enables the beaks to hang them. That's what I did. There's nothing mean about me! And now what does the country do in return? Dogs me, sir, spies on me, watches me night and day, turns against the very man that worked so hard for it. There's something mean about that, anyway. I didn't expect them to knight me, nor to make me Colonial secretary; but, damn it, I did expect that they would let me alone!'

'Well,' I remonstrated, 'if you choose to break laws and assault people, you can't expect it to be looked over on account of former services.'

'I don't refer to my present imprisonment, sir,' said Maloney, with dignity. 'It's the life I've been leading since that cursed trial that takes the soul out of me. Just you sit there on that trestle, and I'll tell you all about it; and then look me in the face and tell me that I've been treated fair by the police.'

I shall endeavour to transcribe the experiences of the convict in his own words, as far as I can remember them, preserving his curious perversions of right and wrong. I can answer for the truth of his facts, whatever may be said for his deductions from them. Months afterwards, inspector H. W. Hann, formerly governor of the gaol at Dunedin, showed me entries in his ledger which corroborated every statement. Maloney reeled the story off in a dull monotonous voice, with his head sunk upon his breast and his hands between his knees. The glitter of his serpent-like eyes was the only sign of the emotions which were stirred up by the recollection of the events which he narrated.

You've read of *Bluemansdyke* (he began, with some pride in his tone). We made it hot while it lasted; but they ran us to earth at last, and a trap called *Braxton*, with a damned Yankee, took the lot of us. That was in New Zealand of course, and they took us down to Dunedin, and there they were convicted and hanged. One and all they put up their hands in the dock and cursed me till your blood would have run cold to hear them, which was scurvy treatment, seeing that we had all been pals together; but they were a blackguard lot, and thought only of themselves. I think it is as well that they were hung.

They took me back to Dunedin gaol and clapped me into the old cell. The only difference they made was, that I had no work to do and was well fed. I stood this for a week or two, until one day the governor was making his round, and I put the matter to him.

'How's this?' I said. 'My conditions were a free pardon, and you're keeping me here against the law.'

He gave a sort of a smile. 'Should you like very much to go out?' he asked.

'So much,' said I, 'that, unless you open that door, I'll have an action against you for illegal detention.'

He seemed a bit astonished by my resolution. 'You're very anxious to meet your death,' he said.

'What d'ye mean?' I asked.

'Come here, and you'll know what I mean,' he answered. And he led me down the passage to a window that overlooked the door of the prison. 'Look at that!' said he.

I looked out, and there were a dozen or so rough-looking fellows standing outside in the street, some of them smoking, some playing cards on the pavement. When they saw me they gave a yell and crowded round the door, shaking their fists and hooting.

'They wait for you, watch and watch about,' said the governor. 'They're the executive of the vigilance committee. However, since you are determined to go, I can't stop you.'

'D'ye call this a civilised land,' I cried, 'and let a man be murdered in cold blood in open daylight?'

When I said this the governor and the warder and every fool in the place grinned as if a man's life was a rare good joke.

'You've got the law on your side,' says the governor; 'so we won't detain you any longer. Show him out, warder.'

He'd have done it too, the black-hearted villain, if I hadn't begged and prayed and offered to pay for my board and lodging, which is more than any prisoner ever did before me. He let me stay on those conditions; and for three months I was caged up there with every larrikin in the township clamouring at the other side of the wall. That was pretty treatment for a man that had served his country!

At last, one morning, up came the governor again.

'Well, Maloney,' he said, 'how long are you going to honour us with your society?'

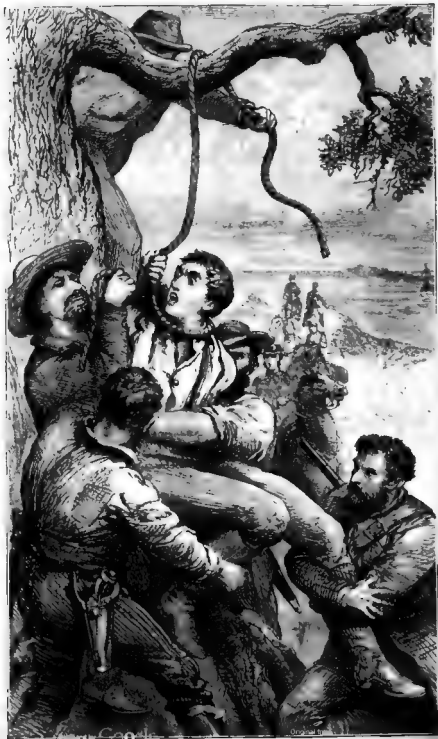
I could have put a knife into his cursed body, and would, too, if we had been alone in the bush; but I had to smile, and smooth him and flatter, for I feared that he might have me sent out.

'You're an infernal rascal,' he said; those were his very words to a man that had helped him all he knew how. 'I don't want any rough justice here, though; and I think I see my way to getting you out of Dunedin.'

'I'll never forget you, governor,' said I; and, by God, I never will.

'I don't want your thanks nor your gratitude,' he answered; 'it's not for your sake that I do it, but simply to keep order in the town. There's a steamer starts from the West Quay to Melbourne to-morrow, and we'll get you aboard it. She is advertised at five in the morning, so have yourself in readiness.'

I packed up the few things I had, and was smuggled out by a back door just before daybreak. I hurried down, took my ticket, under the name of Isaac Smith,



and got safely aboard the Melbourne boat. I remember hearing her screw grinding into the water as the warps were cast loose, and looking back at the lights of Dunedin, as I leaned upon the bulwarks, with the pleasant thought that I was leaving them behind me for ever. It seemed to me that a new world was before me, and that all my troubles had been cast off. I went down below and had some coffee, and came up again feeling better than I had done since the morning that I woke to find that cursed Irishman that took me, standing over me with a six-shooter.

Day had dawned by that time, and we were steaming along by the coast, well out of sight of Dunedin. I loafed about for a couple of hours, and when the sun got well up some of the other passengers came on deck and joined me. One of them, a little perky sort of fellow, took a good long look at me, and then came over and began talking.

'Mining, I suppose?' says he.

'Yes,' I says.

'Made your pile?' he asks.

'Pretty fair,' says I.

'I was at it myself,' he says; 'I worked at the Nelson fields for three months, and spent all I made in buying a salted claim which busted up the second day. I went at it again, though, and struck it rich; but when the gold wagon was going down to the settlements, it was stuck up by those cursed rangers, and not a red cent left.'

'That was a bad job,' I says.

'Broke me—ruined me clean. Never mind, I've seen them all hanged for it; that makes it easier to bear. There's only one left—the villain that gave the evidence. I'd die happy if I could come across him. There are two things I have to do if I meet him.'

'What's that?' says I carelessly.

'I've got to ask him where the money lies—they never had time to make away with it, and its *cachéd* somewhere in the mountains—and then I've got to stretch his neck for him, and send his soul down to join the men that he betrayed.'

It seemed to me that I knew something about that *caché*, and I felt like laughing; but he was watching me, and it struck me that he had a nasty vindictive kind of mind.

'I'm going up on the bridge,' I said, for he was not a man whose acquaintance I cared much about making.

He wouldn't hear of my leaving him, though. 'We're both miners,' he says, 'and we're pals for the voyage. Come down to the bar. I'm not too poor to shout.'

I couldn't refuse him well, and we went down together, and that was the beginning of the trouble. What harm was I doing any one on the ship? All I asked for was a quiet life, leaving others alone and getting left alone myself. No man could ask fairer than that. And now just you listen to what came of it.

We were passing the front of the ladies' cabins, on our way to the saloon, when out comes a servant lass—a freckled currency she-devil—with a baby in her arms. We were brushing past her, when she gave a scream like a railway whistle, and nearly dropped the kid. My nerves gave a sort of a jump when I heard that scream, but I turned and begged her pardon, letting on that I thought I might have trod on her foot. I knew the game was up though, when I saw her white face, and her leaning against the door and pointing.

'It's him,' she cried. 'It's him. I saw him in the court-house. Oh, don't let him hurt the baby!'

'Who is it?' asks the steward and half a dozen others in a breath.

'It's him—Maloney—Maloney, the murderer—O, take him away—take him away!'

I don't rightly remember what happened just at that moment. The furniture and me seemed to get kind of mixed, and there was cursing, and smashing, and some one shouting for his gold, and a general stamp round. When I got steadied a bit, I found somebody's hand in my mouth. From what I gathered afterwards, I conclude that it belonged to that same little man with the vicious way of talking. He got some of it out again, but that was because the others were choking me. A poor chap can get no fair play in this world when once he is down—still I think he will remember me till the day of his death—longer I hope.

They dragged me out into the poop and held a damned court-martial—on *me*, mind you; *me*, that had thrown over my pals in order to serve them. What were they to do with me? Some said this, some said that, but it ended by the Captain deciding to send me ashore. The ship stopped, they lowered a boat, and I was hoisted in, the whole gang of them hooting at me from over the bulwarks. I saw the man I spoke of tying up his hand, though, and I felt that things might be worse.

I changed my opinion before we got to the land. I had reckoned on the shore being deserted, and that I might make my way inland, but the ship had stopped too near the Heads, and a dozen beach-combers and suchlike had come down to the water's edge, and were staring at us, wondering

what the boat was after. When we got to the edge of the surf the coxswain hailed them, and after singing out who I was, he and his men threw me into the water. You may well look surprised—neck and crop into ten feet of water, with shark as thick as green parrots in the bush, and I heard them laughing as I floundered to the shore.

I soon saw it was a worse job than ever. As I came scrambling out through the weeds, I was collared by a big chap with a velveteen coat, and half a dozen others got round me and held me fast. Most of them looked simple fellows enough, and I was not afraid of them; but there was one in a cabbage tree hat that had a very nasty expression on his face, and the big man seemed to be chummy with him.

They dragged me up the beach, and then they let go their hold of me and stood round in a circle.

'Well, mate,' says the man with the hat, 'we've been looking out for you some time in these parts.'

'And very good of you, too,' I answers.

'None of your jaw,' says he. 'Come, boys, what shall it be—hanging, drowning, or shooting? Look sharp!'

This looked a bit too like business. 'No you don't!' I said. 'I've got Government protection, and it'll be murder.'

'That's what they call it,' answered the one in the velveteen coat, as cheery as a piping crow.

'And you're going to murder me for being a ranger?'

'Ranger be damned!' said the man. 'We're going to hang you for peaching against your pals, and that's an end of the palaver.'

They slung a rope round my neck and dragged me up to the edge of the bush. There were

some big she oaks and bluegums, and they pitched on one of these for the wicked deed. They ran the rope over a branch, tied my hands, and told me to say my prayers. It seemed as if it was all up, but Providence interfered to save me. It sounds nice enough sitting here and telling about it, sir, but it was sick work to stand with nothing but the yellow beach in front of you, and the long white line of surf, with the steamer in the distance, and a set of bloody-minded villains round you thirsting for your life.

I never thought I'd owe anything good to the police; but they saved me that time. A troop of them were riding from Hawkes Point Station to Dunedin, and hearing that something was up, they came down through the bush, and interrupted the proceedings. I've heard some bands in my time, Doctor, but I never heard music like the jingle of those traps' spurs and harness as they galloped out on to the open. They tried to hang me even then, but the police were too quick for them, and the man with the hat got one over the head with the flat of a sword. I was clapped on to a horse, and before evening I found myself in my old quarters in the city gaol.

The governor wasn't to be done, though. He was determined to get rid of me, and I was equally anxious to see the last of him. He waited a week or so until the excitement had begun to die away, and then he smuggled me aboard a three-masted schooner bound to Sydney with tallow and hides.

We got fair away to sea without a hitch, and things began to look a bit more rosy. I made sure that I had seen the last of the prison, any way. The crew had a sort of an idea who I was,

and if there'd been any rough weather, they'd have hove me overboard like enough; for they were a rough ignorant lot, and had a notion that I brought bad luck to the ship. We had a good passage, however, and I was landed safe and sound upon Sydney Quay.

Now just you listen to what happened next. You'd have thought they would have been sick of ill-using me and following me by this time—wouldn't you, now? Well, just you listen. It seems that a cursed steamer started from Dunedin to Sydney on the very day we left, and got in before us, bringing news that I was coming. Blessed if they hadn't called a meeting—a regular mass meeting—at the docks to discuss about it, and I marched right into it when I landed. They didn't take long about arresting me, and I listened to all the speeches and resolutions. If I'd been a prince there couldn't have been more excitement. The end of it all was that they agreed that it wasn't right that New Zealand should be allowed to foist her criminals upon her neighbours, and that I was to be sent back again by the next boat. So they posted me off again as if I was a damned parcel; and after another eight hundred mile journey I found myself back for the third time moving in the place that I started from.

By this time I had begun to think that I was going to spend the rest of my existence travelling about from one port to another. Every man's hand seemed turned against me, and there was no peace or quiet in any direction. I was about sick of it by the time I had come back, and if I could have taken to the bush I'd have done it, and chanced it with my old pals. They were too quick for me, though, and kept me under lock and key, but I man-

aged, in spite of them, to negotiate that *caché* I told you of, and sewed the gold up in my belt. I spent another month in gaol, and then they slipped me aboard a barque that was bound for England.

This time the crew never knew who I was, but the captain had a pretty good idea, though he didn't let on to me that he had any suspicions. I guessed from the first that the man was a villain. We had a fair passage, except a gale or two off the Cape, and I began to feel like a free man when I saw the blue loom of the old country, and the saucy little pilot-boat from Falmouth dancing towards us over the waves. We ran down the Channel, and before we reached Gravesend I had agreed with the pilot that he should take me ashore with him when he left. It was at this time that the captain showed me that I was right in thinking him a meddling disagreeable man. I got my things packed, such as they were, and left him talking earnestly to the pilot, while I went below for my breakfast. When I came up again we were fairly into the mouth of the river, and the boat in which I was to have gone ashore had left us. The skipper said the pilot had forgotten me, but that was too thin, and I began to fear that all my old troubles were going to commence once more.

It was not long before my suspicions were confirmed. A boat darted out from the side of the river, and a tall cove with a long black beard came aboard. I heard him ask the mate whether they didn't need a mud-pilot to take them up the reaches, but it seemed to me that he was a man who would know a deal more about handcuffs than he did about steering, so I kept away from him.

He came across the deck, however, and made some remark to me, taking a good look at me the while. I don't like inquisitive people at any time, but an inquisitive stranger with glue about the roots of his beard is the worst of all to stand, especially under the circumstances. I began to feel that it was time for me to go.

I soon got a chance, and made good use of it. A big collier came athwart the bows of our steamer, and we had to slacken down to dead slow. There was a barge astern, and I slipped down by a rope and was into the barge before any one had missed me. Of course I had to leave my luggage behind me, but I had the belt with the nuggets round my waist, and the chance of shaking the police off my track was worth more than a couple of boxes. It was clear to me now that the pilot had been a traitor, as well as the captain, and had set the detectives after me. I often wish I could drop across those two men again.

I hung about the barge all day, as she drifted down the stream. There was one man in her, but she was a big ugly craft, and his hands were too full for much looking about. Towards evening, when it got a bit dusky, I struck out for the shore, and found myself in a sort of marsh place, a good many miles to the east of London. I was soaking wet and half-dead with hunger, but I trudged into the town, got a new rig-out at a slop-shop, and after having some supper, engaged a bed at the quietest lodgings I could find.

I woke pretty early—a habit you pick up in the bush—and lucky for me that I did so. The very first thing I saw when I took a look through a chink in the shutter, was one of these infernal policemen standing right opposite,

and staring up at the windows. He hadn't epaulettes nor a sword, like our traps, but for all that there was a sort of family likeness, and the same busybody expression. Whether they'd followed me all the time, or whether the woman that let me the bed didn't like the looks of me, is more than I have ever been able to find out. He came across as I was watching him, and noted down the address of the house in a book. I was afraid that he was going to ring at the bell, but I suppose his orders were simply to keep an eye on me, for after another good look at the windows he moved on down the street.

I saw that my only chance was to act at once. I threw on my clothes, opened the window softly, and after making sure that there was nobody about, dropped out on to the ground and made off as hard as I could run. I travelled a matter of two or three miles, when my wind gave out; and as I saw a big building with people going in and out, I went in too, and found that it was a railway-station. A train was just going off for Dover to meet the French boat, so I took a ticket and jumped into a third-class carriage.

There were a couple of other chaps in the carriage, innocent-looking young beggars, both of them. They began speaking about this and that, while I sat quiet in the corner and listened. Then they started on England and foreign countries, and suchlike. Look ye now, Doctor, this is a fact. One of them begins jawing about the justice of England's laws. 'It's all fair and above-board,' says he; 'there ain't any secret police, nor spying, like they have abroad,' and a lot more of the same sort of wash. Rather rough on me, wasn't it, listening to the damned young fool, with

the police following me about like my shadow?

I got to Paris right enough, and there I changed some of my gold, and for a few days I imagined I'd shaken them off, and began to think of settling down for a bit of a rest. I needed it by that time, for I was looking more like a ghost than a man. You've never had the police after you, I suppose? Well, you needn't look offended, I didn't mean any harm. If ever you had you'd know that it wastes a man away like a sheep with the rot.

I went to the opera one night and took a box, for I was very flush. I was coming out between the acts when I met a fellow lounging along in the passage. The light fell on his face, and I saw that it was the mud-pilot that had boarded us in the Thames. His beard was gone, but I recognised the man at a glance, for I've a good memory for faces.

I tell you, Doctor, I felt desperate for a moment. I could have knifed him if we had been alone, but he knew me well enough never to give me the chance. It was more than I could stand any longer, so I went right up to him and drew him aside, where we'd be free from all the loungers and theatre-goers.

'How long are you going to keep it up?' I asked him.

He seemed a bit flustered for a moment, but then he saw there was no use beating about the bush, so he answered straight,

'Until you go back to Australia,' he said.

'Don't you know,' I said, 'that I have served the Government and got a free pardon?'

He grinned all over his ugly face when I said this.

'We know all about you, Maloney,' he answered. 'If you want a quiet life, just you go back where

you came from. If you stay here, you're a marked man; and when you are found tripping it'll be a lifer for you, at the least. Free-trade's a fine thing, but the market's too full of men like you for us to need to import any !'

It seemed to me that there was something in what he said, though he had a nasty way of putting it. For some days back I'd been feeling a sort of home-sick. The ways of the people weren't my ways. They stared at me in the street; and if I dropped into a bar, they'd stop talking and edge away a bit, as if I was a wild beast. I'd sooner have had a pint of old Stringybark, too, than a bucketful of their rotgut liquors. There was too much damned propriety. What was the use of having money if you couldn't dress as you liked, nor bust it properly? There was no sympathy for a man if he shot about a little when he was half-over. I've seen a man dropped at Nelson many a time with less row than they'd make over a broken window-pane. The thing was slow, and I was sick of it.

'You want me to go back?' I said.

'I've my orders to stick fast to you until you do,' he answered.

'Well,' I said, 'I don't care if I do. All I bargain is that you keep your mouth shut, and don't let on who I am, so that I may have a fair start when I get there.'

He agreed to this, and we went over to Southampton together the very next day, where he saw me safely off once more. I took a passage round to Adelaide, where no one was likely to know me; and there I settled, right under the nose of the police. I've been there ever since, leading a quiet life, but for little difficulties like the one I'm in for now, and for

that devil, Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury. I don't know what made me tell you all this, Doctor, unless it is that being kind of lonely makes a man inclined to jaw when he gets a chance. Just you take warning from me, though. Never put yourself out to serve your country; for your country will do precious little for you. Just you let them look after their own affairs; and if they find a difficulty in hanging a set of scoundrels, never mind chipping in, but let them alone to do as best they can. Maybe they'll remember how they treated me after I'm dead, and be sorry for neglecting me. I was rude to you when you came in, and swore a trifle promiscuous; but don't you mind me, it's only my way. You'll allow, though, that I have cause to be a bit touchy now and again when I think of all that's passed. You're not going, are you? Well, if you must, you must; but I hope you will look me up at odd times when you are going your round. O, I say, you've left the balance of that cake of tobacco behind you, haven't you? No; it's in your pocket—that's all right. Thank ye, Doctor, you're a good sort, and as quick at a hint as any man I've met.'

A couple of months after narrating his experiences, Wolf Tone Maloney finished his term, and was released. For a long time I neither saw him nor heard of him; and he had almost slipped from my memory, until I was reminded, in a somewhat tragic manner, of his existence. I had been attending a patient some distance off in the country, and was riding back, guiding my tired horse among the boulders which strewed the pathway, and endeavouring to see my way through the gathering darkness, when I came suddenly upon

a little wayside inn. As I walked my horse up towards the door, intending to make sure of my bearings before proceeding further, I heard the sound of a violent altercation within the little bar. There seemed to be a chorus of expostulation or remonstrance, above which two powerful voices rang out loud and angry. As I listened, there was a momentary hush, two pistol shots sounded almost simultaneously, and, with a crash, the door burst open, and a pair of dark figures staggered out into the moonlight. They struggled for a moment in a deadly wrestle, and then went down together among the loose stones. I had sprung off my horse, and, with the help of half a dozen rough fellows from the bar, dragged them away from one another.

A glance was sufficient to convince me that one of them was dying fast. He was a thick-set burly fellow, with a determined cast of countenance. The blood was welling from a deep stab in his throat, and it was evident that an important artery had been divided. I turned away from him in despair, and walked over to where his antagonist was lying. He was shot through the lungs, but managed to raise himself upon his hand as I approached, and peered anxiously up into my face. To my surprise I saw before me the haggard features and flaxen hair of my prison acquaintance, Maloney.

'Ah, Doctor!' he said, recognising me. 'How is he? Will he die?'

He asked the question so earnestly that I imagined he had softened at the last moment, and feared to leave the world with another homicide upon his conscience. Truth, however, compelled me to shake my head mournfully,

and to intimate that the wound would prove a mortal one.

Maloney gave a wild cry of triumph, which brought the blood welling out from between his lips. 'Here, boys,' he gasped to the little group around him. 'There's money in my inside pocket. Damn the expense! Drinks round. There's nothing mean about me. I'd drink with you, but I'm going. Give the Doc. my share, for he's as good—' Here his head fell back with a thud, his eye glazed, and the soul of Wolf Tone Maloney, forger, convict, ranger, murderer, and Government peach, drifted away into the Great Unknown.

I cannot conclude without borrowing the account of the fatal quarrel, which appeared in the columns of the *West Australian Sentinel*. The curious will find it in the issue of the 4th of October 1881:

'Fatal Affray.—W. T. Maloney, a well-known citizen of New Montrose, and proprietor of the Yellow Boy gambling saloon, has met with his death under rather painful circumstances. Mr. Maloney was a man who had led a chequered existence, and whose past history is replete with interest. Some of our readers may recall the Lena Valley murders, in which he figured as the principal criminal. It is conjectured that, during the seven months that he owned a bar in that region, from twenty to thirty travellers were hounded and made away with. He succeeded, however, in evading the vigilance of the officers of the law, and allied himself with the bushrangers of Blue-mansdyke, whose heroic capture and subsequent execution are matters of history. Maloney extricated himself from the fate which awaited him by turning

Queen's evidence. He afterwards visited Europe, but returned to West Australia, where he has long played a prominent part in local matters. On Friday evening he encountered an old enemy, Thomas Grimthorpe, commonly known as Tattooed Tom of Hawkesbury. Shots were exchanged, and both men were badly wounded,

only surviving a few minutes. Mr. Maloney had the reputation of being, not only the most wholesale murderer that ever lived, but also of having a finish and attention to detail in matters of evidence, which has been unapproached by any European criminal. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

A. CONAN DOYLE.

THE
COMPLIMENTS
OF
THE SEASON
TO YOU,



GENTLE
READER
OF
'LONDON
SOCIETY.'

SOME REMARKABLE DREAMERS.

At the French lottery offices it used to be a custom to keep a separate register of the lucky numbers which had been suggested by dreams, they were so numerous and so remarkable. Never did a day pass without adding to the wonderful record, and faith in dreams grew in consequence even more rapidly than the list did in the register. It was so in England while the lotteries existed, and is so abroad where they still exist. Many strange stories of this kind are told.

Amongst remarkable dreamers we have authors who, continuing the occupation of the day, have composed through the night while asleep. In this way Voltaire composed his verses to Monsieur Tournon.

The most thoughtful and eminent philosophers have regarded the phenomena of dreams with the deepest interest. Lord Byron, repeating an idea as aged as Heraclitus, says :

‘ Our life is twofold : sleep hath its own world.’

Herrick also wrote long before Byron :

‘ Here we are all by day ; by night w’ are hurl’d

By dreams each one into a sev’rall world.’

And strange indeed such worlds are ; worlds in which time and space have no laws, and everything that is actual and real seems to blend with everything fanciful and unreal, without for an instant appearing improbable or extraordinary. In a dream the coward is brave, the foolish wise, and the defeated triumphant, the little are

great, the blind see, the lame walk, the joyous are sad, the sad joyous, the prosperous fail, and the weak are strong. We see without eyes in a dream, speak without a tongue, and hear without ears, walk without legs, handle without hands. Events which would demand years for their occurrence pass in the fraction of a second, and yet seem to the sleeper as real and orderly in their progression as the events of his waking hours. And although so strangely separated, the waking worlds and those of sleep are intimately united, and the influence of one upon the other is too palpable to be missed.

From the most ancient times dreams have been regarded as prophetic symbols, capable of useful and important interpretations, and many astonishingly strange stories are told in which their significance was apparently demonstrated. Anciently they were broadly divided into good and evil dreams, and means for securing the one or avoiding the other were solemnly adopted. Pliny said aniseed placed on the pillow, so that the sleeper smelt it, would prevent dreams from being disagreeable, while the seed of pycnomen, taken in doses of one drachm in wine, produced nightmare. Both Pliny and Aristotle regarded dreams as most frequent in the spring and autumn. Among the ancients dream-interpreting was a regular trade, and Artemidorus is credited with exalting it into a science by the publication of his five books of *Oneirocritica*,

first printed in Greek at Venice in the year 1518, and sometime called *The Dreamer's Bible*.

Galen tells of a man who dreamed that his left thigh had become stone, and who soon after lost the use of it by a dead palsy; of another, one of his patients, who dreamed that he was in a vessel full of blood, which he accepted as a sign that the man ought to be bled, by which means a serious disease under which he laboured was cured.

Dion Cassius stated that his history was written in obedience to a dream, and Cyprian that he was instructed by a dream to mix wine and water in the Eucharist. Lactanus believed that dreams were the agents of the Divinity, St. Bernard of Clairvaux that they were often instigated by devils. Thomas Aquinas held it folly to deny that future events were indicated by dreams, and Josephus carefully studied his dreams as the divine guides by which all his actions were to be governed. Bishop Bull held the same belief, and so, it appears, did Bishop Ken.

Amongst the most remarkable dreams on record the following will always have their places.

THE DREAM OF THOMAS LORD LYTTLETON.

Breakfasting with some ladies on November 25th, 1779, at his house in Hill Street, London, Thomas Lord Lyttleton spoke of a very curious dream he had dreamt in the night. In this dream a bird flew into a room where he was, and while he looked at it changed into a female, who told him to prepare for another world, as in three days he would die. He was then well, and, as he laughingly said, did not look like a man so near death. On the Saturday also he told the

same ladies that he felt perfectly well, and believed he should 'bilk the ghost.'

Some hours afterwards he went with Mr. Fortescue and Captain Wolsley to Pitt Place, Epsom, ate for supper an egg, went cheerfully and talkatively to bed, hoped he should have good rolls for breakfast, and suddenly expired while Stuckey, his servant, was assisting him to remove his under-waistcoat.

This story has been told in various ways; the above account is that given by Lord Westcote, Lord Lyttleton's uncle.

THE DREAM OF CALPURNIA.

Plutarch records that Cæsar being in bed with his wife Calpurnia, when the Ides of March had come, but, alas, were not yet gone, was much disturbed by the groans she uttered in her sleep, and awoke her. She then told him that she had dreamt of holding him, murdered, in her arms. On the following day, so deeply was this dream impressed upon her mind, and so great the terror it occasioned, that she implored him to remain at home that day and adjourn the meeting of the Senate. He was startled; and knowing her to be a woman of strong mind, and in nowise superstitious, he offered sacrifices and consulted the diviners, by whom he was advised to adjourn the Senate, and would have done so had he not been persuaded to the contrary by one of the conspirators against his life, who laughed at the dream and the diviners, and warned Cæsar against giving offence to the Senate, just when they were prepared to crown his most ambitious desires. Imperial Cæsar listened, and went out with him to meet his death.

THE DREAMS OF AUGUSTUS.

At the battle of Philippi, al-

though Augustus being unwell had determined not to leave his tent, a dream urging him to quit it he did so, and thereby his life was saved, for an attack of the enemy resulted in its capture and destruction.

At another time, after visiting a temple near the Capitol which he had dedicated to Jupiter Tonans, he dreamt that Jupiter Capitolinus came to him complaining that the new temple had taken away his worshippers; to which he replied no, he had but given him a porter at his gate. To carry out this idea bells were hung round the summit of the new temple, such as were usually found at the gates of great houses.

In consequence of another dream Augustus, on a certain day in the year, always begged alms of the people in the attitude of a mendicant—head bent, hand outstretched.

THE DREAM OF MONICA.

St. Augustine tells the story of his mother's dream, at a time when he was still involved in vice and sensuality, very touchingly, as follows:

'And Thou sentest Thine hand from above, and drewest my soul out of that profound darkness. My mother, Thy faithful one, weeping to Thee for me more than mothers weep the bodily deaths of their children. For she, by that faith and spirit which she had from Thee, discerned the death wherein I lay, and Thou heardest her, O Lord. Thou heardest her, and despisedst not her tears, when, streaming down, they watered the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed; yea, Thou heardest her. For whence was that dream whereby Thou comfortedst her, so that she allowed me to live with and to eat at the same table in

the house, which she had begun to shrink from, abhorring and detesting the blasphemies of my error? For she saw herself standing on a certain wooden rule, and a shining youth coming towards her, cheerful and smiling upon her, herself grieving and overwhelmed with grief. But he having inquired of her the causes of her grief and daily tears, and she answering that she was bewailing my perdition, he bade her rest contented, and told her to look and observe that where she was there was I also. And when she looked she saw me standing by her on the same rule.'

THE DREAM OF LADY WARRE'S CHAPLAIN.

In 'Some Passages of the Life and Death of the Right Hon. John Earl of Rochester, who died July 26th, 1680,' we read how this lord told the writer that the chaplain of his mother-in-law, Lady Warre, dreamt that he would die on a certain day. The idea was ridiculed by the family, and he had almost forgotten it, when one evening at supper it was discovered that there were thirteen at table, which, 'according to a fond conceit'—in other words, a foolish one—indicated the death of one of them, and a young lady pointed out the chaplain as that one—probably in fun. This recalled the dream, and the chaplain was at once thrown into a state of agitation. He expressed his belief that before the morning he must die; but being then in excellent health, no one heeded his words. On the following morning he was found dead in his bed.

THE DREAM OF ARCHBISHOP ABBOT'S MOTHER.

John Aubrey tells that a poor clothworker's wife, living in Gilford, named Abbot, dreamt that if

she would eat a jack, her son, who was about to be born, would grow up and become a great man. Early on the next morning she went to the river for water, and caught in her pail a fine jack, which she cooked and ate, all or nearly all. The child was born, grew up, became a scholar in the town, and finally Archbishop of Canterbury—of course, through his mother eating the fish, or so thought John Aubrey, F.R.S.

SIR THOMAS WHITE'S DREAM.

In the year 1557 Sir Thomas White, Alderman of London, being a wealthy and philanthropic man, dreamed that he had founded a college at a place where three elms were growing from one root. Seeking such a tree in Oxford, he found one near Gloucester Hall, which he therefore repaired and endowed. But afterwards, finding the very tree of his dream at a spot where formerly stood a convent of the Bernardines, he purchased the ground, and there erected his college, to which Archbishop Laud made additions.

A TINKER'S DREAM.

Vouched for both by tradition and history, the strange dream of the Swaffham tinker has a fair claim to rank with the wonderful dreams to which these pages are devoted. The story of it runs as follows :

About three hundred or more years ago the above-named ancient town in Norfolk, remarkable of old for its healthiness and beauty, had, amongst its inhabitants, an industrious hard-working tinker, named John Chapman, traditionally said to have been the beneficent builder of the north aisle of Swaffham church. Certain it is that in that north aisle there are various devices of a pedlar and his dog, and of a shopkeeper, or

chapman, which seems like a rebus upon the traditional name, a species of conceit prevalent in ancient times. Certain also is it that in 1462 the name of one of the churchwardens was Chapman, and that in each of the original windows of this aisle was a painting of the tinker, his wife, and three children.

One night the tinker dreamed that if he went to London and stood on London Bridge he would there meet some one who would make his fortune and put an end to all his weary wanderings over hill and dale in search of work. Deeply impressed by this dream, he spoke of it in the morning to his wife so seriously and with such an evident belief in it, that she both scolded and laughed at what she called his folly. Strangely enough, as the tinker thought, the dream, which had doubtless haunted his mind all day, was repeated on the next night; and the impression, thus deepened and strengthened, not unnaturally brought a third repetition of it on the night following, after which John was no longer to be withheld from going to London.

Despite the remonstrances of his friends, the entreaties of his wife, and the ridicule of his neighbours, the tinker set out to travel all the way afoot, a distance of not less than ninety miles. At the close of the third day he reached the end of his journey, slept at an inn, and early in the morning stationed himself on London Bridge at a spot which he remembered was that pointed out to him in his dream. And there he remained all day, eyed curiously by the passers-by and suspiciously by the shopkeepers who lived on the bridge, and by the keepers of its gates, which closed at a certain regular hour to guard the City from evil cha-

racters, of which the Bankside and other parts of Southwark had a larger share than was good for its reputation. Nothing was, however, said to him that appeared to be in any way connected with his dream.

The experiment was repeated on the second day, with no other result than that of intensifying the curiosity and suspicion which he had provoked on the first day. But after he had passed a third day on the bridge, and the evening gloom, which warned him of the closing gates, was again upon him, one of the shopkeepers, who had eyed him wonderingly on each previous occasion, ventured to ask him what possible reason he could have for standing there every day and all day long. The tinker confessed that he had been induced to make a fool of himself by a very singular dream. The stranger laughed at him heartily. 'If I had been as credulous as you are,' said he, 'I should be on just such another fool's errand; for three nights this week I dreamt the same dream, and in it I was told to go to a place called Swaffham, which I find is ninety odd miles away. I thought in my dream that under an apple-tree in an orchard on the north side of the town I was told to dig, and that there I should discover a box full of money.'

After some further questions and answers on either side, they parted; and the tinker, saying nothing of the place he had come from, went away, again hopeful; and, with restored cheerfulness and faith in his dream, set out early the next morning for home. One of the first things he did on reaching it was to visit the orchard indicated by the stranger's dream. He recognised at once, by certain peculiarities, the tree he had asked the London dreamer

to describe; and, digging under it, soon laid bare the top of an iron box. To unearth this, and convey it to his home unobserved, was his next task; and, this accomplished, it was opened, and found to be full of money. Imagine his triumph and delight! On the outside of the box were some words, which, being unable to read, he did not know the meaning of. Afraid to make his secret known, or awaken suspicions which might lead to unpleasant circumstances, he hit upon a plan for finding out what the words said. This was to place the box at the door of the Grammar School, so that its inscription might be read by the boys as they came out and while he stood by, as if by accident. The boys soon gathered round the box, and one, scraping the dirt and rust from the inscription, read, doubtless amidst much laughter, the apparently meaningless lines:

'Where this casket stood
Is another twice as good.'

Hearing these significant words, John Chapman went away, hardly able to restrain his exultation and pleasure, and, early the next morning, he was again digging in the deserted orchard, where his efforts were rewarded by the discovery of a second casket, twice as large as the first, and equally well filled.

Whatever fiction that love of the marvellous, which was common to the age John Chapman lived in, may have added to the story of his very strange dream, the existence of a tomb, bearing the stone effigy of a smith or tinker, with his tools beside him, and a dog, was in existence not many years since, and may probably still be seen in the old church at Swaffham.

A FEW MORE DREAMS.

Cicero is the authority for a remarkable dream, related by Valerius Maximus of two travellers who put up in Megara, one at an inn, the other at the house of a friend. At night one dreamed that the other came to him in a state of awful agitation, saying his host was attempting to murder him, and imploring his aid. This made a deep impression, and awoke him; but, treating it as 'only a dream,' he again went to sleep. His friend once more appeared, saying the crime was committed, and his body had been concealed under a dung-heap, from which he desired him to remove it. In the morning early he went to rouse his companion and resume their journey, and as he entered the courtyard met a carter removing a load of dung, which he insisted upon examining.

The body of his murdered friend was found in it, the crime was exposed, and the murderer executed. We may add that as no record exists of Cicero's visiting Megara—and it is most improbable that he ever did so—he may have merely repeated this old Greek story from hearsay, although there is nothing in it more astonishing than we have in the preceding records.

Pliny, on better authority, tells as strange a story of one of his own slaves who, while sleeping amongst his fellows, dreamt that two men in white came into the slaves' sleeping-place, shaved their (the slaves') heads, and escaped as they had come. In the morning he found the dream realised.

One dreamer—an old woman of Marseilles, who visited church every day and passed almost her entire time before a certain altar—dreamt that she had been transformed into a lamp eternally burning before it, and herself made as sure of its realisation as she could by leaving in her will the money for suspending there a silver lamp; but this was hardly a fair case of prophetic dreaming.

A remarkable dream-story is told by the present German Emperor. He dreamt one night that, standing at the Kur Spring, Karlsbad, a man gave him a small china cup to drink from which contained a deadly poison. He laughed in the morning at the remembrance of this dream, and mentioned the fact that every morning when he drank at the Kur Spring the cup was presented to him by a charming young girl whom he was sure could never contemplate murder. For the first time, however, on that morning, instead of the girl, a man appeared and handed him the cup. The Emperor hesitated, but, looking into the man's kindly face, he smiled to himself and took the draught. 'Of course it did not harm me,' says Emperor William; 'but, on the contrary, my stay at Karlsbad, instead of proving fatal, was very beneficial.'

One of the most curious phases of dreaming is that of dreaming of a dream in a dream over and over and over again, and so far as this morsel of dream experience goes the writer of this paper may rightfully subscribe himself also

A REMARKABLE DREAMER.

A SPECTRE IN A MESS-ROOM.

A True Story.

IN the month of April 187—, a group of officers were assembled at chota-hazri, under the pleasant shade of a couple of luxuriant mango-trees. On the white cloth that covered the table were eatables of various kinds, the most inviting being some melons—water, as well as musk—which smelt deliciously. Overhead, deftly slung from a wooden framework, with lazy even beat, oscillated a light deep-fringed punkha. It was pulled by a semi-somnolent Hindoo coolie, attired in little else save his own bronze-coloured skin; yet, such was the force of habit, he did not give one the impression of being at all too scantily clad. A short distance off—ten yards or so—stood a large handsome bungalow; this was the mess-house of the officers, who belonged to the —— Regiment of Lancers, quartered just now at Mirabad, one of the pleasantest stations in the north-western provinces of India.

The group referred to were in their white summer uniform, which, in the glare of the fierce sunlight, rather dazzled and distressed the eye; but in the shadow of the dark-green overhanging foliage the effect was both cool and picturesque.

The leave season had just commenced, and the young fellows, while refreshing the inner man, were gaily reckoning up their chances of visiting the various hill-stations—Simla, Mussoorie, Nynetal, or even going as far as that famous paradise of sportsmen, Cashmere; exception, however,

must be made in respect of two of their number, who, comparatively silent, were seated a little apart, and on whose countenances there was no sign of merriment visible.

Suddenly a horse's hoofs pattered along the drive leading to the bungalow, and a second later the rider came in view. He dismounted a short distance from the party, and, handing his horse to a servant, approached the chota-hazri table.

'Well, doctor?' interrogatively said one of the quieter men, addressing the new-comer.

'Not well; indeed, just the contrary, I am sorry to say,' replied Dr. Anderson gravely: 'poor Mrs. Morgan is dead.'

There was a slight pause.

'Terrible business for Morgan,' presently remarked the first speaker, in a thoughtful voice; 'she was all in all to him. I'm afraid he'll go to the bad.'

Some years ago, when Thomas Morgan first joined the —— Lancers as their veterinary surgeon, the verdict of the officers, not given hastily, but after due deliberation, was that he was by no means an acquisition to the corps; in truth, the more severely critical, if asked their private opinion, would have had but little hesitation in pronouncing him coarse, self-sufficient, and unsteady.

As time passed, the general impression regarding the vet's character became confirmed; moreover, it seemed as if he were deteriorating to even a lower level. Then Morgan unexpectedly

did that which raised him a hundred per cent in the estimation of every one. He married a woman whom almost any man would have been proud to call his wife.

Handsome, ladylike, and accomplished, Mrs. Morgan also possessed tact and discrimination, and in a little while she became quite a favourite in the regiment. That a man of Morgan's calibre should have persuaded a woman of this stamp to marry him was something in his favour; soon, too, it became abundantly clear that the lady thoroughly understood her husband's weak points, for she managed him with so much judgment that the improvement in him became marked; indeed, after a few months of married life, the vet surgeon was voted quite altered, and rather 'a good fellow.'

And now, as the doctor had stated, a bitter affliction had befallen the husband; the wife, whom he had so loved and looked up to, had died, after giving birth to a still-born child, and he, unstable and weak-principled, was left alone, a prey to intense grief. Under the circumstances, therefore, it was not surprising that the men at the breakfast-table who heard the observation, 'Poor Morgan will certainly go to the bad,' should feel that the dismal prediction was only too likely to be verified.

An interval of two or three years has elapsed since the sad event chronicled above, and I now come to the incident on which the interest of this narrative chiefly depends. At this time the — Lancers were quartered at Aldershot, having returned home from their foreign service in India. The mess-house of the regiment was situated in the centre of the front row of the

block of buildings known as the West Cavalry Barracks. These face the Avenue Road, and are only a few hundred yards to the east of All Saints', the garrison church. The mess-room was a large lofty apartment, rectangular in shape, with one of its lesser sides almost occupied by a great arched window, which was heavily curtained. In the centre of the room was a long dining-table; it stood in such a position that an individual sitting at the top-end would be facing the window, and, of course, one sitting at the bottom would have his back towards it.

One evening, rather late in October, a number of officers were seated in this mess-room at dinner. At the top of the table, filling the post of president, was Lieutenant Robert Norris, the orderly officer of the day. He was a pleasant fair-haired young fellow, and on this occasion seemed particularly cheerful, for early next day he was to start for Ireland on a month's leave. To his right sat a guest of his, Captain Wilson: the latter had come down to Aldershot on a visit to his friend, and intended accompanying Norris across the Channel on the ensuing morning. There was no one at the foot of the table, but the chairs on either side of the vice-president's were occupied, one by Dr. Anderson, the senior surgeon of the regiment, the other by a young officer of the same corps called Beamish. In the intermediate seats were a few other men whose names it is unnecessary to specify. It ought also to be mentioned that the evening twilight outside was only partially excluded, the curtains being but half drawn.

The conversation had been brisk and lively, the most prominent Aldershot topics had been discussed, and there had occurred

one of those momentary intervals of silence, which are not uncommon during dinner, when the company was startled by the loud exclamation of one of its members.

‘Good God, man, are you ill? what on earth is the matter?’

The speaker was young Beamish. He was addressing his *vis-à-vis*, Dr. Anderson, towards whom all eyes were at once turned.

There was a white, scared look on the surgeon’s face, and he was staring at the window with eyes half out of their sockets. It was evident he had received a shock of some kind.

‘No—nothing,’ he answered, with an effort; ‘but—ah! did you see *that woman*?’

‘See a woman—where?’ asked the other wonderingly.

‘I saw her all right, Anderson,’ exclaimed Norris, from the top of the table—‘rather pallid-looking, and dressed in a sort of bridal dress that seemed slightly stained; she certainly looked in at us as she walked past the window.’

‘What unmitigated nonsense!’ cried Beamish energetically. ‘You’re both mad—the window is at least thirty feet from the ground, and there is no balcony outside, but merely a narrow ledge, along which it would be impossible for any one, except a ghost, to walk.’

‘By Jove! I never thought of that,’ said Norris, starting up impulsively. He ran to the window and began pushing aside the curtains. ‘But you saw her too, Anderson,’ he continued, in an amazed tone, ‘and, somehow, the features seemed familiar.’

‘Yes,’ replied the surgeon; ‘I certainly saw a woman dressed in white pass quite close by to the window and glance in for an instant. But it was the strange woful expression in the eyes as they met

mine that startled and disturbed me. I fancied I recognised in her some one I knew; yet, for the life of me, I can’t call to mind who she is.’

The doctor, who had quite recovered his composure, spoke in a clear collected voice. He, too, now rose from his seat and approached the window. Then there ensued a scene of considerable excitement, in which surprise and curiosity were largely blended. The dinner-table was quickly deserted, the window thrown open, and all the servants summoned. The premises were examined, and all kinds of nooks and corners invaded and ransacked, for the discovery of the intruder, the more especially as Beamish suggested somebody might be attempting to play off a practical joke on them. The search, however, proved fruitless. There was no trace of the mysterious female who had given so rude a shock to one of the party and ruffled the serenity of all.

Of course, almost with one accord, they scouted the notion that the apparition could possibly have an immaterial personality. *Who ever heard of a spectre in a mess-room?* The idea was preposterous—absurd; and then, how idle and objectless seemed a visitation whose purpose no one could recognise! They were either the victims of a hoax, or, as was more likely, of a spectral or optical illusion. So far the officers. The question, however, might fairly be asked, which of the following contingencies was the more improbable—the appearance of a disembodied spirit, given that disembodied spirits exist; or that two individuals, of totally different types, in the perfect possession of their senses, sitting far apart, should, amid the distraction of dinner, brilliant

lights, and gay conversation, conjure up, exactly at the same moment, a spectral illusion, which, in face, figure, and dress, should be absolutely identical? Moreover, as will be shown a little later, the vision was not so entirely without purpose as at first sight they judged it to be.

To resume. The commotion gradually subsided, and the officers again took their seats, but their cheerfulness seemed to have vanished and the talk flagged; if a stray remark were passed, it led to nothing.

‘I wonder if the apparition portends misfortune to either of you two?’ said Beamish, derisively glancing towards Norris and Anderson.

Neither answered.

Presently Wilson addressed his host.

‘You have to visit the guards to-night. When do you start?’

‘After midnight,’ answered Norris briefly.

‘I’ll go round with you.’

But the other wouldn’t hear of it. However, nothing untoward happened, and early next morning the two friends left for Ireland.

A month later, his leave having expired, Norris rejoined his regiment.

On arriving, one of the first persons he encountered was the surgeon, with whom of course he entered into conversation.

After a little he said rather abruptly,

‘Ah, Anderson, how about the apparition? did you unravel the mystery of its appearance?’

‘I thought you knew; surely you have heard all about it?’ replied his companion, with an air of surprise.

‘Not a word, not a syllable,’ said the other. ‘To tell the truth, the matter has troubled me but

little; still, I’m glad it admits of a rational explanation.’

‘A rational explanation!’ echoed the doctor, with a queer smile. He drew from his pocket a large gold locket, and having opened it he handed it to his friend. ‘Just look at that,’ he continued.

‘Good Heavens!’ cried Norris, gazing at the miniature, ‘it is the spectre! Why, it is the portrait of Mrs. Morgan, who died in India! I’m more puzzled than ever.’

‘I suppose, then, I’d better begin at the beginning and explain,’ said the surgeon. ‘As you are aware, Morgan—who has been steadily going downhill since his wife’s death—was induced, about two months ago, to leave Aldershot on sick-leave for change of air and scene. Well, after that extraordinary experience of ours at dinner, I passed a restless uncomfortable night, sleeping very badly; I therefore got up earlier than usual, intending to take a brisk walk before going to hospital. Soon after I left the barracks I met Burke, Morgan’s servant, and casually asked him if he had any news of his master. To my astonishment he informed me that Morgan had returned to Aldershot four days ago, and at the present moment was lying in his quarters seriously unwell. Of course I went to him immediately, and then the true state of affairs at once became clear. Morgan, perhaps hardly responsible for his actions, had concealed his arrival that he might, unchecked, give free rein to his intense craving for stimulants, and now he was so ill that I had very little hope of his recovery. After doing all I could for him, I was turning to leave the room, when my eyes fell on the large coloured photograph of his wife, that stood on a side-table. Then, in an instant, like a flash came the con-

viction that Mrs. Morgan and the apparition were identical, and that it was her features, seen distinctly as she walked past the window, that I had been trying in vain to recall; in the likeness she was dressed as a bride in white. You know I was with the poor lady in her last illness, and I take it the meaning of the vision was to call my attention to the fact that her husband was dying uncared for and alone, within a few hundred yards of where we were dining so merrily.'

'It is a strange occurrence, the very strangest in my experience,'

said Norris thoughtfully. 'I remember the photo you mention quite well; this one in the locket is the same, only reduced in size. I believe I knew more of Morgan than most of the others, as our rooms opened into the same corridor, and I was, in a way, his next neighbour; perhaps that may be one reason why I also saw the apparition. How long is it since Morgan died?'

'He expired a fortnight ago,' replied the surgeon—'quietly, I am thankful to say, and with his faculties clear.'

SELECTING A GHOST.

The Ghosts of Goresthorpe Grange.

I AM sure that Nature never intended me to be a self-made man. There are times when I can hardly bring myself to realise that twenty years of my life were spent behind the counter of a grocer's shop in the East End of London, and that it was through such an avenue that I reached a wealthy independence and the possession of Goresthorpe Grange. My habits are Conservative, and my tastes refined and aristocratic. I have a soul which spurns the vulgar herd. Our family, the D'Odds, date back to a prehistoric era, as is to be inferred from the fact that their advent into British history is not commented on by any trustworthy historian. Some instinct tells me that the blood of a Crusader runs in my veins. Even now, after the lapse of so many years, such exclamations as 'By'r Lady!' rise naturally to my lips, and I feel that, should circumstances require it, I am capable of rising in my stirrups and dealing an infidel a blow—say with a mace—which would considerably astonish him.

Goresthorpe Grange is a feudal mansion—or so it was termed in the advertisement which originally brought it under my notice. Its right to this adjective had a most remarkable effect upon its price, and the advantages gained may possibly be more sentimental than real. Still, it is soothing to me to know that I have slits in my staircase through which I can discharge arrows; and there is a sense of power in the fact of pos-

sessing a complicated apparatus by means of which I am enabled to pour molten lead upon the head of the casual visitor. These things chime in with my peculiar humour, and I do not grudge to pay for them. I am proud of my battlements and of the circular uncovered sewer which girds me round. I am proud of my portcullis and donjon and keep. There is but one thing wanting to round off the mediævalism of my abode, and to render it symmetrically and completely antique. Goresthorpe Grange is not provided with a ghost.

Any man with old-fashioned tastes and ideas as to how such establishments should be conducted would have been disappointed at the omission. In my case it was particularly unfortunate. From my childhood I had been an earnest student of the supernatural, and a firm believer in it. I have revelled in ghostly literature until there is hardly a tale bearing upon the subject which I have not perused. I learned the German language for the sole purpose of mastering a book upon demonology. When an infant I have secreted myself in dark rooms in the hope of seeing some of those bogies with which my nurse used to threaten me; and the same feeling is as strong in me now as then. It was a proud moment when I felt that a ghost was one of the luxuries which my money might command.

It is true that there was no mention of an apparition in the

advertisement. On reviewing the mildewed walls, however, and the shadowy corridors, I had taken it for granted that there was such a thing on the premises. As the presence of a kennel presupposes that of a dog, so I imagined that it was impossible that such desirable quarters should be untenanted by one or more restless shades. Good heavens, what can the noble family from whom I purchased it have been doing during these hundreds of years! Was there no member of it spirited enough to make away with his sweetheart, or take some other steps calculated to establish a hereditary spectre? Even now I can hardly write with patience upon the subject.

For a long time I hoped against hope. Never did rat squeak behind the wainscot, or rain drip upon the attic-floor, without a wild thrill shooting through me as I thought that at last I had come upon traces of some unquiet soul. I felt no touch of fear upon these occasions. If it occurred in the night-time, I would send Mrs. D'Odd—who is a strong-minded woman—to investigate the matter while I covered up my head with the bedclothes and indulged in an ecstasy of expectation. Alas, the result was always the same! The suspicious sound would be traced to some cause so absurdly natural and commonplace that the most fervid imagination could not clothe it with any of the glamour of romance.

I might have reconciled myself to this state of things had it not been for Jorrocks of Havistock Farm. Jorrocks is a coarse, burly, matter-of-fact fellow whom I only happen to know through the accidental circumstance of his fields adjoining my demesne. Yet this man, though utterly devoid of all ap-

preciation of archæological unities, is in possession of a well-authenticated and undeniable spectre. Its existence only dates back, I believe, to the reign of the Second George, when a young lady cut her throat upon hearing of the death of her lover at the battle of Dettingen. Still, even that gives the house an air of respectability, especially when coupled with bloodstains upon the floor. Jorrocks is densely unconscious of his good fortune; and his language when he reverts to the apparition is painful to listen to. He little dreams how I covet every one of those moans and nocturnal wails which he describes with unnecessary objurgation. Things are indeed coming to a pretty pass when democratic spectres are allowed to desert the landed proprietors and annul every social distinction by taking refuge in the houses of the great unrecognised.

I have a large amount of perseverance. Nothing else could have raised me into my rightful sphere, considering the uncongenial atmosphere in which I spent the earlier part of my life. I felt now that a ghost must be secured, but how to set about securing one was more than either Mrs. D'Odd or myself was able to determine. My reading taught me that such phenomena are usually the outcome of crime. What crime was to be done, then, and who was to do it? A wild idea entered my mind that Watkins, the house-steward, might be prevailed upon—for a consideration—to immolate himself or some one else in the interests of the establishment. I put the matter to him in a half-jesting manner; but it did not seem to strike him in a favourable light. The other servants sympathised with him in his opinion—at least, I cannot

account in any other way for their having left the house in a body the same afternoon.

'My dear,' Mrs. D'Odd remarked to me one day after dinner, as I sat moodily sipping a cup of sack—I love the good old names—'my dear, that odious ghost of Jorrocks' has been gibbering again.'

'Let it gibber!' I answered recklessly.

Mrs. D'Odd struck a few chords on her virginal and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

'I'll tell you what it is, Argentine,' she said at last, using the pet name which we usually substituted for Silas, 'we must have a ghost sent down from London.'

'How can you be so idiotic, Matilda?' I remarked severely. 'Who could get us such a thing?'

'My cousin, Jack Bocket, could,' she answered confidently.

Now, this cousin of Matilda's was rather a sore subject between us. He was a rakish clever young fellow, who had tried his hand at many things, but wanted perseverance to succeed at any. He was, at that time, in chambers in London, professing to be a general agent, and really living, to a great extent, upon his wits. Matilda managed so that most of our business should pass through his hands, which certainly saved me a great deal of trouble; but I found that Jack's commission was generally considerably larger than all the other items of the bill put together. It was this fact which made me feel inclined to rebel against any further negotiations with the young gentleman.

'O yes, he could,' insisted Mrs. D., seeing the look of disapprobation upon my face. 'You remember how well he managed that business about the crest?'

'It was only a resuscitation of

the old family coat-of-arms, my dear,' I protested.

Matilda smiled in an irritating manner. 'There was a resuscitation of the family portraits, too, dear,' she remarked. 'You must allow that Jack selected them very judiciously.'

I thought of the long line of faces which adorned the walls of my banqueting-hall, from the burly Norman robber, through every gradation of casque, plume, and ruff, to the sombre Chesterfieldian individual who appears to have staggered against a pillar in his agony at the return of a maiden ms. which he grips convulsively in his right hand. I was fain to confess that in that instance he had done his work well, and that it was only fair to give him an order—with the usual commission—for a family spectre, should such a thing be attainable.

It is one of my maxims to act promptly when once my mind is made up. Noon of the next day found me ascending the spiral stone staircase which leads to Mr. Bocket's chambers, and admiring the succession of arrows and fingers upon the whitewashed wall, all indicating the direction of that gentleman's sanctum. As it happened, artificial aids of the sort were entirely unnecessary, as an animated flap-dance overhead could proceed from no other quarter, though it was replaced by a deathly silence as I groped my way up the stair. The door was opened by a youth evidently astounded at the appearance of a client, and I was ushered into the presence of my young friend, who was writing furiously in a large ledger—upside down, as I afterwards discovered.

After the first greetings, I plunged into business at once.

'Look here, Jack,' I said, 'I

want you to get me a spirit, if you can.'

'Spirits you mean!' shouted my wife's cousin, plunging his hand into the waste-paper basket and producing a bottle with the celerity of a conjuring trick. 'Let's have a drink!'

I held up my hand as a mute appeal against such a proceeding so early in the day; but on lowering it again I found that I had almost involuntarily closed my fingers round the tumbler which my adviser had pressed upon me. I drank the contents hastily off, lest any one should come in upon us and set me down as a toper. After all, there was something very amusing about the young fellow's eccentricities.

'Not spirits,' I explained smilingly; 'an apparition—a ghost. If such a thing is to be had, I should be very willing to negotiate.'

'A ghost for Goresthorpe Grange?' inquired Mr. Bocket, with as much coolness as if I had asked for a drawing-room suite.

'Quite so,' I answered.

'Easiest thing in the world,' said my companion, filling up my glass again in spite of my remonstrance. 'Let us see!' Here he took down a large red note-book, with all the letters of the alphabet in a fringe down the edge. 'A ghost you said, didn't you? That's G. G—gems—gimlets—gaspipes—gauntlets—guns—galleys. Ah, here we are. Ghosts. Volume nine, section six, page forty-one. Excuse me!' And Jack ran up a ladder and began rummaging among a pile of ledgers on a high shelf. I felt half inclined to empty my glass into the spittoon when his back was turned; but on second thoughts I disposed of it in a legitimate way.

'Here it is!' cried my London

agent, jumping off the ladder with a crash, and depositing an enormous volume of manuscript upon the table. 'I have all these things tabulated, so that I may lay my hands upon them in a moment. It's all right—it's quite weak' (here he filled our glasses again). 'What were we looking up, again?'

'Ghosts,' I suggested.

'Of course; page 41. Here we are. "J. H. Fowler & Son, Dunkel Street, suppliers of mediums to the nobility and gentry; charms sold—love-philtres—mummies—horoscopes cast." Nothing in your line there, I suppose?'

I shook my head despondingly.

'Frederick Tabb,' continued my wife's cousin, 'sole channel of communication between the living and the dead. Proprietor of the spirits of Byron, Kirke White, Grimaldi, Tom Cribb, and Inigo Jones. That's about the figure!'

'Nothing romantic enough there,' I objected. 'Good heavens! Fancy a ghost with a black eye and a handkerchief tied round its waist, or turning summersaults, and saying, "How are you to-morrow?"' The very idea made me so warm that I emptied my glass and filled it again.

'Here is another,' said my companion, "'Christopher McCarthy; bi-weekly séances—attended by all the eminent spirits of ancient and modern times. Nativities—charms—abracadabras, messages from the dead." He might be able to help us. However, I shall have a hunt round myself to-morrow, and see some of these fellows. I know their haunts, and it's odd if I can't pick up something cheap. So there's an end of business,' he concluded, hurling the ledger into the corner, 'and now we'll have something to drink.'

We had several things to drink—so many that my inventive faculties were dulled next morning, and I had some little difficulty in explaining to Mrs. D'Odd why it was that I hung my boots and spectacles upon a peg along with my other garments before retiring to rest. The new hopes excited by the confident manner in which my agent had undertaken the commission caused me to rise superior to alcoholic reaction, and I paced about the rambling corridors and old-fashioned rooms, picturing to myself the appearance of my expected acquisition, and deciding what part of the building would harmonise best with its presence. After much consideration, I pitched upon the banqueting-hall as being, on the whole, most suitable for its reception. It was a long low room, hung round with valuable tapestry and interesting relics of the old family to whom it had belonged. Coats of mail and implements of war glimmered fitfully as the light of the fire played over them, and the wind crept under the door, moving the hangings to and fro with a ghastly rustling. At one end there was the raised dais, on which in ancient times the host and his guests used to spread their table, while a descent of a couple of steps led to the lower part of the hall, where the vassals and retainers held wassail. The floor was uncovered by any sort of carpet, but a layer of rushes had been scattered over it by my direction. In the whole room there was nothing to remind one of the nineteenth century; except, indeed, my own solid silver plate, stamped with the resuscitated family arms, which was laid out upon an oak table in the centre. This, I determined, should be the haunted room, supposing my wife's

cousin to succeed in his negotiation with the spirit-mongers. There was nothing for it now but to wait patiently until I heard some news of the result of his inquiries.

A letter came in the course of a few days, which, if it was short, was at least encouraging. It was scribbled in pencil on the back of a playbill, and sealed apparently with a tobacco-stopper. 'Am on the track,' it said. 'Nothing of the sort to be had from any professional spiritualist, but picked up a fellow in a pub yesterday who says he can manage it for you. Will send him down unless you wire to the contrary. Abrahams is his name, and he has done one or two of these jobs before.' The letter wound up with some incoherent allusions to a cheque, and was signed by my affectionate cousin, John Bocket.

I need hardly say that I did not wire, but awaited the arrival of Mr. Abrahams with all impatience. In spite of my belief in the supernatural, I could scarcely credit the fact that any mortal could have such a command over the spirit-world as to deal in them and barter them against mere earthly gold. Still, I had Jack's word for it that such a trade existed; and here was a gentleman with a Judaical name ready to demonstrate it by proof positive. How vulgar and commonplace Jorrocks' eighteenth-century ghost would appear should I succeed in securing a real mediæval apparition! I almost thought that one had been sent down in advance, for, as I walked round the moat that night before retiring to rest, I came upon a dark figure engaged in surveying the machinery of my portcullis and drawbridge. His start of surprise, however, and the manner in which he hurried off into the darkness, speedily con-

vinced me of his earthly origin, and I put him down as some admirer of one of my female retainers mourning over the muddy Hellespont which divided him from his love. Whoever he may have been, he disappeared and did not return, though I loitered about for some time in the hope of catching a glimpse of him and exercising my feudal rights upon his person.

Jack Bocket was as good as his word. The shades of another evening were beginning to darken round Goresthorpe Grange, when a peal at the outer bell, and the sound of a fly pulling up, announced the arrival of Mr. Abrahams. I hurried down to meet him, half expecting to see a choice assortment of ghosts crowding in at his rear. Instead, however, of being the sallow-faced melancholy-eyed man that I had pictured to myself, the ghost-dealer was a sturdy little podgy fellow, with a pair of wonderfully keen sparkling eyes and a mouth which was constantly stretched in a good-humoured, if somewhat artificial, grin. His sole stock-in-trade seemed to consist of a small leather bag jealously locked and strapped, which emitted a metallic chink upon being placed on the stone flags of the hall.

'And 'ow are you, sir?' he asked, wringing my hand with the utmost effusion. 'And the missis, 'ow is she? And all the others—'ow's all their 'ealth?'

I intimated that we were all as well as could reasonably be expected; but Mr. Abrahams happened to catch a glimpse of Mrs. D'Odd in the distance, and at once plunged at her with another string of inquiries as to her health, delivered so volubly and with such an intense earnestness that I half expected to see him terminate his cross examination by

feeling her pulse and demanding a sight of her tongue. All this time his little eyes rolled round and round, shifting perpetually from the floor to the ceiling, and from the ceiling to the walls, taking in apparently every article of furniture in a single comprehensive glance.

Having satisfied himself that neither of us was in a pathological condition, Mr. Abrahams suffered me to lead him up-stairs, where a repast had been laid out for him to which he did ample justice. The mysterious little bag he carried along with him, and deposited it under his chair during the meal. It was not until the table had been cleared and we were left together that he broached the matter on which he had come down.

'I hunderstand,' he remarked, puffing at a trichinopoly, 'that you want my 'elp in fitting up this 'ere 'ouse with a happarition.'

I acknowledged the correctness of his surmise, while mentally wondering at those restless eyes of his, which still danced about the room as if he were making an inventory of the contents.

'And you won't find a better man for the job, though I says it as shouldn't,' continued my companion. 'Wot did I say to the young gent wot spoke to me in the bar of the *Lame Dog*? "Can you do it?" says he. "Try me," says I, "me and my bag. Just try me." I couldn't say fairer than that.'

My respect for Jack Bocket's business capacities began to go up very considerably. He certainly seemed to have managed the matter wonderfully well. 'You don't mean to say that you carry ghosts about in bags?' I remarked, with diffidence.

Mr. Abrahams smiled a smile of superior knowledge. 'You

wait,' he said ; ' give me the right place and the right hour, with a little of the essence of *Lucoptolycus*'—here he produced a small bottle from his waistcoat-pocket—'and you won't find no ghost that I ain't up to. You'll see them yourself, and pick your own, and I can't say fairer than that.'

As all Mr. Abraham's protestations of fairness were accompanied by a cunning leer and a wink from one or other of his wicked little eyes, the impression of candour was somewhat weakened.

'When are you going to do it?' I asked reverentially.

'Ten minutes to one in the morning,' said Mr. Abrahams, with decision. 'Some says midnight, but I says ten to one, when there ain't such a crowd, and you can pick your own ghost. And now,' he continued, rising to his feet, 'suppose you trot me round the premises, and let me see where you wants it ; for there's some places as 'attracts 'em, and some as they won't hear 'of—not if there was no other place in the world.'

Mr. Abrahams inspected our corridors and chambers with a most critical and observant eye, fingering the old tapestry with the air of a connoisseur, and remarking in an undertone that it would 'match uncommon nice.' It was not until he reached the banqueting-hall, however, which I had myself picked out, that his admiration reached the pitch of enthusiasm. ' 'Ere's the place !' he shouted, dancing, bag in hand, round the table on which my plate was lying, and looking not unlike some quaint little goblin himself. ' 'Ere's the place ; we won't get nothin' to beat this ! A fine room—noble, solid, none of your electro-plate trash ! That's the way as things ought to be done,

sir. Plenty of room for 'em to glide here. Send up some brandy and the box of weeds ; I'll sit here by the fire and do the preliminaries, which is more trouble than you'd think ; for them ghosts carries on hawful at times, before they finds out who they've got to deal with. If you was in the room they'd tear you to pieces as like as not. You leave me alone to tackle them, and at half-past twelve come in, and I lay they'll be quiet enough by then.'

Mr. Abraham's request struck me as a reasonable one, so I left him with his feet upon the mantelpiece, and his chair in front of the fire, fortifying himself with stimulants against his refractory visitors. From the room beneath, in which I sat with Mrs. D'Odd, I could hear that after sitting for some time he rose up, and paced about the hall with quick impatient steps. We then heard him try the lock of the door, and afterwards drag some heavy article of furniture in the direction of the window, on which, apparently, he mounted, for I heard the creaking of the rusty hinges as the diamond-paned casement folded backwards, and I knew it to be situated several feet above the little man's reach. Mrs. D'Odd says that she could distinguish his voice speaking in low and rapid whispers after this, but that may have been her imagination. I confess that I began to feel more impressed than I had deemed it possible to be. There was something awesome in the thought of the solitary mortal standing by the open window and summoning in from the gloom outside the spirits of the nether world. It was with a trepidation which I could hardly disguise from Matilda that I observed that the clock was pointing to half-past twelve, and that the time had

come for me to share the vigil of my visitor.

He was sitting in his old position when I entered, and there were no signs of the mysterious movements which I had overheard, though his chubby face was flushed as with recent exertion.

'Are you succeeding all right?' I asked as I came in, putting on as careless an air as possible, but glancing involuntarily round the room to see if we were alone.

'Only your help is needed to complete the matter,' said Mr. Abrahams, in a solemn voice. 'You shall sit by me and partake of the essence of *Lucoptolycus*, which removes the scales from our earthly eyes. Whatever you may chance to see, speak not and make no movement, lest you break the spell.' His manner was subdued, and his usual cockney vulgarity had entirely disappeared. I took the chair which he indicated, and awaited the result.

My companion cleared the rushes from the floor in our neighbourhood, and, going down upon his hands and knees, described a half circle with chalk, which enclosed the fireplace and ourselves. Round the edge of this half-circle he drew several hieroglyphics, not unlike the signs of the zodiac. He then stood up and uttered a long invocation, delivered so rapidly that it sounded like a single gigantic word in some uncouth guttural language. Having finished this prayer, if prayer it was, he pulled out the small bottle which he had produced before, and poured a couple of teaspoonfuls of clear transparent fluid into a phial, which he handed to me with an intimation that I should drink it.

The liquid had a faintly sweet odour, not unlike the aroma of certain sorts of apples. I hesi-

tated a moment before applying it to my lips, but an impatient gesture from my companion overcame my scruples, and I tossed it off. The taste was not unpleasant; and, as it gave rise to no immediate effects, I leaned back in my chair and composed myself for what was to come. Mr. Abrahams seated himself beside me, and I felt that he was watching my face from time to time while repeating some more of the invocations in which he had indulged before.

A sense of delicious warmth and languor began gradually to steal over me, partly, perhaps, from the heat of the fire, and partly from some unexplained cause. An uncontrollable impulse to sleep weighed down my eyelids, while, at the same time, my brain worked actively, and a hundred beautiful and pleasing ideas flitted through it. So utterly lethargic did I feel that, though I was aware that my companion put his hand over the region of my heart, as if to feel how it were beating, I did not attempt to prevent him, nor did I even ask him for the reason of his action. Everything in the room appeared to be reeling slowly round in a drowsy dance, of which I was the centre. The great elk's head at the far end wagged solemnly backwards and forwards, while the massive salvers on the tables performed cotillions with the claret-cooler and the epergne. My head fell upon my breast from sheer heaviness, and I should have become unconscious had I not been recalled to myself by the opening of the door at the other end of the hall.

This door led on to the raised daïs, which, as I have mentioned, the heads of the house used to reserve for their own use. As it swung slowly back upon its

hinges, I sat up in my chair, clutching at the arms, and staring with a horrified glare at the dark passage outside. Something was coming down it—something unformed and intangible, but still a *something*. Dim and shadowy, I saw it flit across the threshold, while a blast of ice-cold air swept down the room, which seemed to blow through me, chilling my very heart. I was aware of the mysterious presence, and then I heard it speak in a voice like the sighing of an east wind among pine-trees on the banks of a desolate sea.

It said: 'I am the invisible nonentity. I have affinities and am subtle. I am electric, magnetic, and spiritualistic. I am the great ethereal sigh-heaver. I kill dogs. Mortal, wilt thou choose me?'

I was about to speak, but the words seemed to be choked in my throat; and, before I could get them out, the shadow flitted across the hall and vanished in the darkness at the other side, while a long-drawn melancholy sigh quivered through the apartment.

I turned my eyes towards the door once more, and beheld, to my astonishment, a very small old woman, who hobbled along the corridor and into the hall. She passed backwards and forwards several times, and then, crouching down at the very edge of the circle upon the floor, she disclosed a face the horrible malignity of which shall never be banished from my recollection. Every foul passion appeared to have left its mark upon that hideous countenance.

'Ha! ha!' she screamed, holding out her wizened hands like the talons of an unclean bird. 'You see what I am. I am the fiendish old woman. I wear

snuff-coloured silks. My curse descends on people. Sir Walter was partial to me. Shall I be thine, mortal?'

I endeavoured to shake my head in horror; on which she aimed a blow at me with her crutch, and vanished with an eldritch scream.

By this time my eyes turned naturally towards the open door, and I was hardly surprised to see a man walk in of tall and noble stature. His face was deadly pale, but was surmounted by a fringe of dark hair which fell in ringlets down his back. A short pointed beard covered his chin. He was dressed in loose-fitting clothes, made apparently of yellow satin, and a large white ruff surrounded his neck. He paced across the room with slow and majestic strides. Then turning, he addressed me in a sweet, exquisitely-modulated voice.

'I am the cavalier,' he remarked. 'I pierce and am pierced. Here is my rapier. I clink steel. This is a blood-stain over my heart. I can emit hollow groans. I am patronised by many old Conservative families. I am the original manor-house apparition. I work alone, or in company with shrieking damsels.'

He bent his head courteously, as though awaiting my reply, but the same choking sensation prevented me from speaking; and, with a deep bow, he disappeared.

He had hardly gone before a feeling of intense horror stole over me, and I was aware of the presence of a ghastly creature in the room of dim outlines and uncertain proportions. One moment it seemed to pervade the entire apartment, while at another it would become invisible, but always leaving behind it a distinct consciousness of its presence. Its voice, when it spoke, was quaver-

ing and gusty. It said, 'I am the leaver of footsteps and the spiller of gout of blood. I tramp upon corridors. Charles Dickens has alluded to me. I make strange and disagreeable noises. I snatch letters and place invisible hands on people's wrists. I am cheerful. I burst into peals of hideous laughter. Shall I do one now?' I raised my hand in a deprecating way, but too late to prevent one discordant outbreak which echoed through the room. Before I could lower it the apparition was gone.

I turned my head towards the door in time to see a man come hastily and stealthily into the chamber. He was a sunburned powerfully-built fellow, with earrings in his ears and a Barcelona handkerchief tied loosely round his neck. His head was bent upon his chest, and his whole aspect was that of one afflicted by intolerable remorse. He paced rapidly backwards and forwards like a caged tiger, and I observed that a drawn knife glittered in one of his hands, while he grasped what appeared to be a piece of parchment in the other. His voice, when he spoke, was deep and sonorous. He said, 'I am a murderer. I am a ruffian. I crouch when I walk. I step noiselessly. I know something of the Spanish Main. I can do the lost treasure business. I have charts. Am able-bodied and a good walker. Capable of haunting a large park.' He looked towards me beseechingly, but before I could make a sign I was paralysed by the horrible sight which appeared at the door.

It was a very tall man, if, indeed, it might be called a man, for the gaunt bones were protruding through the corroding flesh, and the features were of a leaden hue. A winding-sheet was wrapped

round the figure, and formed a hood over the head, from under the shadow of which two fiendish eyes, deepset in their grisly sockets, blazed and sparkled like red-hot coals. The lower jaw had fallen upon the breast, disclosing a withered shrivelled tongue and two lines of black and jagged fangs. I shuddered and drew back as this fearful apparition advanced to the edge of the circle.

'I am the American blood-curdler,' it said, in a voice which seemed to come in a hollow murmur from the earth beneath it. 'None other is genuine. I am the embodiment of Edgar Allan Poe. I am circumstantial and horrible. I am a low-caste spirit-subduing spectre. Observe my blood and my bones. I am gristly and nauseous. No depending on artificial aid. Work with grave-clothes, a coffin-lid, and a galvanic battery. Turn hair white in a night.' The creature stretched out its fleshless arms to me as if in entreaty, but I shook my head; and it vanished, leaving a low sickening repulsive odour behind it. I sank back in my chair, so overcome by terror and disgust that I would have very willingly resigned myself to dispensing with a ghost altogether, could I have been sure that this was the last of the hideous procession.

A faint sound of trailing garments warned me that it was not so. I looked up, and beheld a white figure emerging from the corridor into the light. As it stepped across the threshold I saw that it was that of a young and beautiful woman dressed in the fashion of a bygone day. Her hands were clasped in front of her, and her pale proud face bore traces of passion and of suffering. She crossed the hall with a gentle sound, like the rustling of autumn leaves, and then, turning her

lovely and unutterably sad eyes upon me, she said,

‘I am the plaintive and sentimental, the beautiful and ill-used. I have been forsaken and betrayed. I shriek in the night-time and glide down passages. My antecedents are highly respectable and generally aristocratic. My tastes are æsthetic. Old oak furniture like this would do, with a few more coats of mail and plenty of tapestry. Will you not take me?’

Her voice died away in a beautiful cadence as she concluded, and she held out her hands as if in supplication. I am always sensitive to female influences. Besides, what would Jorrocks’ ghost be to this? Could anything be in better taste? Would I not be exposing myself to the chance of injuring my nervous system by interviews with such creatures as my last visitor, unless I decided at once? She gave me a seraphic smile, as if she knew what was passing in my mind. That smile settled the matter. ‘She will do!’ I cried; ‘I choose this one;’ and as, in my enthusiasm, I took a step towards her I passed over the magic circle which had girdled me round.

‘Argentine, we have been robbed!’

I had an indistinct consciousness of these words being spoken, or rather screamed, in my ear a great number of times without my being able to grasp their meaning. A violent throbbing in my head seemed to adapt itself to their rhythm, and I closed my eyes to the lullaby of ‘Robbed, robbed, robbed.’ A vigorous shake caused me to open them again, however, and the sight of Mrs. D’Odd in the scantiest of costumes and most furious of tempers was sufficiently impressive to recall all my scattered thoughts, and make me realise that I was

lying on my back on the floor, with my head among the ashes which had fallen from last night’s fire, and a small glass phial in my hand.

I staggered to my feet, but felt so weak and giddy that I was compelled to fall back into a chair. As my brain became clearer, stimulated by the exclamations of Matilda, I began gradually to recollect the events of the night. There was the door through which my supernatural visitors had filed. There was the circle of chalk with the hieroglyphics round the edge. There was the cigar-box and brandy-bottle which had been honoured by the attentions of Mr. Abrahams. But the seer himself—where was he? and what was this open window with a rope running out of it? And where, O where, was the pride of Goresthorpe Grange, the glorious plate which was to have been the delectation of generations of D’Odds? And why was Mrs. D. standing in the gray light of dawn, wringing her hands and repeating her monotonous refrain? It was only very gradually that my misty brain took these things in, and grasped the connection between them.

Reader, I have never seen Mr. Abrahams since; I have never seen the plate stamped with the resuscitated family crest; hardest of all, I have never caught a glimpse of the melancholy spectre with the trailing garments, nor do I expect that I ever shall. In fact my night’s experiences have cured me of my mania for the supernatural, and quite reconciled me to inhabiting the humdrum nineteenth-century edifice on the outskirts of London which Mrs. D. has long had in her mind’s eye.

As to the explanation of all that occurred—that is a matter

which is open to several surmises. That Mr. Abrahams, the ghost-hunter, was identical with Jemmy Wilson, *alias* the Nottingham crackster, is considered more than probable at Scotland Yard, and certainly the description of that remarkable burglar tallied very well with the appearance of my visitor. The small bag which I have described was picked up in a neighbouring field next day, and found to contain a choice assortment of jemmies and centrebits. Footmarks deeply imprinted in the mud on either side of the moat showed that an accomplice from below had received the sack of precious metals which had been let down through the open window. No doubt the pair of scoundrels, while looking round for a job, had overheard Jack Bocket's indiscreet inquiries, and had promptly availed themselves of the tempting opening.

And now as to my less substantial visitors, and the curious grotesque vision which I had enjoyed—am I to lay it down to any real power over occult matters possessed by my Nottingham friend? For a long time I was doubtful upon the point, and eventually endeavoured to solve it by consulting a well-known analyst and medical man, sending him the few drops of the so-called essence of *Lucoptolycus* which remained in my phial. I append the letter which I received from him, only too happy to have the opportunity of winding up my little narrative

by the weighty words of a man of learning.

‘Arundel Street.

‘Dear Sir,—Your very singular case has interested me extremely. The bottle which you sent contained a strong solution of chloral, and the quantity which you describe yourself as having swallowed must have amounted to at least eighty grains of the pure hydrate. This would of course have reduced you to a partial state of insensibility, gradually going on to complete coma. In this semi-unconscious state of chloralism it is not unusual for circumstantial and *bizarre* visions to present themselves—more especially to individuals unaccustomed to the use of the drug. You tell me in your note that your mind was saturated with ghostly literature, and that you had long taken a morbid interest in classifying and recalling the various forms in which apparitions have been said to appear. You must also remember that you were expecting to see something of that very nature, and that your nervous system was worked up to an unnatural state of tension. Under the circumstances, I think that, far from the sequel being an astonishing one, it would have been very surprising indeed to any one versed in narcotics had you not experienced some such effects.—I remain, dear sir, sincerely yours,

‘T. E. STUBE, M.D.

‘Argentine D’Odd, Esq.
The Elms, Brixton.’

A. CONAN DOYLE.

AMUSING GHOST STORIES.

THE CRIPPLE TAILOR.

IN the Highlands, as elsewhere, stealing seems to be a trade to which young people are often apprenticed. Donald Macwhirter, who was an old thief, took as his apprentice a young lad named Duncan Macgraggan. Donald wished to try the mettle of his apprentice at the very beginning of their connection. So Duncan was told off for stealing a sheep, while Donald himself stole vegetables from a kitchen-garden—a much more dangerous job. Their place of rendezvous was to be the churchyard, as they were least likely to be disturbed there. As was to be expected, the experienced Donald was first at the place, and, while waiting Duncan, amused himself by thinking over the treat in store for him.

That evening several neighbours met, as usual, in a tailor's shop, and, oddly enough, the conversation turned on ghosts, and especially on the one which was said to haunt the neighbouring churchyard. One little cripple tailor said, 'I don't believe in any ghosts, and if I had the use of my legs I'd go this very night, and stay there, to show you that there are none.' 'Well,' said Angus Murray, 'if you'll go there, I'll carry you on my back.' The poor tailor could not escape from the dilemma with good grace, and so consented to go. As Angus, with the tailor on his back, was entering the churchyard-gate, Donald, who was sitting on a stone, mistook them for Duncan with the sheep on his back, and, in a low hoarse voice,

said, 'Is he fat?' 'Whether he be fat or no,' said Angus, 'there he is for you;' and, so saying, he threw down the tailor, to whom fear supplied legs; at least, he was back at the shop as soon as Angus, who had run all the way.

THE RESURRECTIONIST'S FRIGHT.

George Mackaskill lived in a small cottage adjoining the parish burying-ground. He had a sharp young son, about eleven years of age, whom familiarity with the churchyard had deprived of all superstition. Renwick—for that was the boy's name—often got into scrapes, for which he always got punished by his father when on his way to bed. On one occasion he used a sixpence of his mother's without her consent. This Renwick knew to be a grave offence, and went up-stairs ere his father, who was late, came home. Fear prevented him falling asleep till he should know the upshot of his crime. The sound of his father's foot on the stair was ominous in Renwick's ears; and so he quickly jumped up, hid behind the door, and, when his father went forward to the bed, he rushed down-stairs, and away out to the churchyard, with nothing on save his night-dress. There he hid beneath a table-like gravestone. He preferred to stay here all night rather than go home to the thrashing which he knew awaited him.

Shortly after the clock struck one he heard a gig approach, an unusual thing in such a place at such an hour. Renwick lay still. The gig stopped at the gate, and

three men jumped down, took a couple of spades and a pick out of the boot, and were coming in at the gate, when one of them said, 'Which of us is to hold the horse?' Renwick heard this, and, seeing an easy way out of the scrape, he jumped from underneath the stone, and exclaimed, 'I'll hold the horse for saxpence.' The suddenness and whiteness of the apparition startled them, and at once they threw down spades and pick, and were soon galloping away at sixteen miles an hour. Renwick ran out after them, and shouted, 'Ye needna run away, I'm no dead;' but they heard him not.

CHARGING A GHOST.

John Williamson was reared in the Highlands, and heard many ghost stories told by people who really believed in them. As a consequence, John was very superstitious, though he would not confess as much. At the age of twenty he 'joined the soldiers,' and had been only six months a soldier when his regiment was ordered to Ireland. As John was in the first detachment to reach the new barracks, he had several conversations with those about to leave. They told him, among other things, that their captain had died a month previously in *delirium tremens*, and that his ghost had been seen on several occasions by those on night duty. Upon hearing this John kept to the barracks after nightfall, in the hope that the old gentleman would follow his regiment—in *spirit*. It fell to John's lot to go on sentry on the fourth night after his arrival. It was dark when he received his orders, so that he saw little of his surroundings. He went into his sentry-box, and stayed there for full twenty minutes, during which time the moon

came above the horizon. He thought that with its light he might have little fear, and boldly stepped out of his box. But every hair stood on end when he saw what he thought to be the old captain standing only five paces in front of him with drawn sword. To run was against all law; so John thought he would cover himself with honour by simply doing his duty. He challenged for the first time, and came to 'port'—no answer; a second time, and came to the 'ready'—no answer; he then said, 'Now, remember, I'm to challenge the third time, and if you don't answer I'll run you through. Who goes there?' A moment's pause—no answer, and then, with full force, John charged; but, instead of running the object through, he was thrown on his back by the recoil. When he got up he was confronted by an officer, who had hurried to the spot when he heard the challenging, and said, 'Well, John, what have you been charging?' 'I think it must have been the d-d-d-e-e-eh, for he was dreadfully hard!' said John, scarce able to bring out the words. 'Poor fellow, I hope you haven't broken your bayonet against this tall pump,' said the good-natured officer.

THE HAUNTED CASTLE.

Let the story of the Rev. Thomas Muchworth be told in his own words:

'Many years ago, in company with two other English clergymen, I paid a visit to Sutherlandshire, of the scenery of which we had heard so much. The beauty of the part in which we lived much surpassed our expectations, and we spent whole days in simply wandering up and down the hills. On one occasion we made a longer than usual excursion into the interior, and thought

of returning only when it was growing dark. We did not then understand the signs of the weather, and were wholly unprepared for a wild thunderstorm, which came on very suddenly. It soon grew dark and darker; but we struggled bravely on, sometimes falling into bogs, and at other times running against peats set up to dry. After two hours of miserable weary wanderings, we happily espied a light, towards which we gladly bent our steps. When we came up, we found that the light proceeded from a very small hut of one room. We knocked at the door, and in the name of charity demanded admission. An old woman answered us from within, "Who are you? What do you want?" and, without waiting an answer, went on, "You can't get in here: none lives here but myself, and I have little enough room; you had better go away." When she stopped we said that we were benighted, that the night was stormy, and that she surely was not cruel enough to keep us out. "O yes, I must keep you out," she replied; "but let me tell you that, only half a mile away, you will find a beautiful castle, with tables spread, and comfortable rooms awaiting you. But, remember, I tell you the place is haunted. Will you go?" We said we would. She opened the door, and pointed the way. We soon reached a castle, which we saw to be beautiful without, and, on entering, found it comfortable within. We went to a spacious bedroom and put on dry clothes, which seemed to have been put there on purpose for us, for, as yet, we saw nobody in or about the place. We then went down to the dining-room, and there found the table laid with many tempting viands, of which we partook. We also freely

helped ourselves to the wine, which was of excellent quality. About eleven o'clock we proposed going to bed, as we were very tired. As we had hitherto found everything as the old woman said, we thought there might be something of truth in her statements, and cast lots as to who should watch while the other two slept. The lot fell on me, and the two of them were soon asleep. I sat—nervously, I must confess—in the easy-chair by the fire. Just as the clock in the tower struck twelve, I heard a low whistle. I thought, "Well, I'll not be coward enough to waken them for a whistle." Presently, I heard another, and forthwith the bedroom door opened, and in walked a big burly Highlander armed to the teeth with claymore, dirks, and pistols. As soon as he entered he presented the pistol to my head, and said, "Follow me." I thought that, if I resisted, he would murder both my companions and myself, so, to give them a chance of escape, I got up and followed him. He led me down a long corkscrew stair, and when we reached the bottom he asked me to open a door. For a moment I resisted. He lifted the pistol to my head, and I obeyed. He led me through a gloomy room, at the further side of which I saw a small stream of blood trickling down a rock, in which was fixed what appeared to me to be a knob. This knob, the Highlander said, I must turn if I wanted to escape. I joyfully set myself to turning it, and felt a stream of warm blood meanwhile fall on my wrist. I heard a loud unearthly scream, and awoke—for I was just taking a nap after dinner—and found that I had nearly screwed the nose off my poor wife, who unfortunately had fallen asleep on the easy-chair opposite.'

THE GHAIST O' GHAIRLEE.

OF course in these practical times no one really believes in ghosts. If one perceives anything now that one is justified in considering abnormal, one regards it steadily, analyses it calmly; and, if it persistently declines disappearing under that treatment, one turns over, and, while dozing off again, merely reflects that, as our digestion is so obviously out of order, it will be as well to see the family doctor in the morning.

All this if we happen to see our ghost when in bed—which spot, I will maintain, is the very best whence we can witness the supernatural. There is not only a feeling of security in it, but also the old-fashioned and effective last resource of pulling the bed-clothes over the head, if things get too alarming.

The incident I am about to relate occurred to myself when on a visit to an old house far in the wilds of Ross-shire. Scotland is, *par excellence*, the land of visions. Few are the places that have not some tradition, more or less ghostly, attached to them. Gloomy and grim stand the old houses, frowning down from their rocks, or buried among dark fir-trees; and there is a cause for their forbidding aspect. The sullen shadow of past crimes hangs over them. If we could ever expect revelations from the other world, and those revelations of an unpleasant character, it is in one of these time honoured abodes.

Last autumn I was invited by my dear old friend, or rather my dear father's dear old friend, the

Laird o' Ghairlee, to make one of a shooting-party assembling there. I was aware that Ghairlee was a desirable location wherein to find oneself when the grouse-shooting begins. Sport is good there, if anywhere; and, moreover, the laird owned a covey of pretty daughters, who would be sure to make things lively and pleasant. Personally I do not care for a party composed solely of my own sex. It is apt to become heavy and wearisome. The men's bad points develop with fearsome rapidity in such a forcing atmosphere. No, give me the judicious mixture so evidently intended by kindly Providence! When I am middle aged, and have come into the fine legacy of gout left me by too generous progenitors, I may alter my opinion, but not now, while I have still a few attractions left.

I arrived, then, at Ghairlee Station full of hope, and prepared for enjoyment. I brought with me my choicest guns and my beloved violin, without which I never travel. Ghairlee itself is a curious old house; the passages run about it in an extremely complicated fashion, up one step a room, down two steps into it, and so on. The hall is a portion of the old tower; the walls of immense thickness. Many additions have been made at intervals by different lairds, long since gathered to their fathers.

I did not see all this the night of my arrival—in sooth, it was so dark that I could distinguish very little as the dog-cart spun

up the avenue; but I did notice that we turned a very sharp corner round a block of buildings, while, on the other hand, I heard the roaring of a torrent far below.

'Hold on, sir!' cried the groom; a warning quite needed, for I nearly found myself over the side of the trap, so abrupt was the swerve.

The next moment we drew up before the door, barred and studded with iron nails. Light was pouring from the hall, and the laird, surrounded by a howling body-guard of Scotch terriers, came forward to greet me.

'Whisht, dogs! Come in, laddie; delighted to see ye again. Bless me, you look other than when you were newly over your jaundice!'

Here we reached the drawing-room, which was gained by mounting a low stairway and traversing a large corridor thickly carpeted, and furnished with several pieces of antique workmanship—cabinets and so on. The drawing-room was at the far end, and there were again a few steps leading to it alone. By the side of these steps and against the wall stood a fine press or cupboard of marqueterie, quaintly inlaid, and used for stowing away odds and ends; and here my tuneful beauty, in his embroidered case, found a refuge after a day or two.

Report had not exaggerated the charms of the laird's daughters. There were four of them, but the youngest was merely a child—a most charming one, it is true, but she does not count. The other three ranged from sixteen to twenty-two, all delightful ages!

I found, after a time, that the eldest was already appropriated; but there remained the adorable second and the exquisite third. This last was, perhaps, just a

shade too young to understand sentiment; but the second, whose lovely name of 'Mavie' was, I regret to say, derived from Malvina, the odious cognomen of a distant relative, had tastes much akin to my own. She loved music, so do I; and many were the duets we treated the others to.

Time went on; days passed; weeks were gone with all too great rapidity. The cream of the shooting was over, and reluctantly I prepared to return Londonwards; in fact, I had arrived at my last evening in Ghairlee.

We were gathered in the drawing-room, the party much diminished by this time; one or two men still remained; and a few neighbours, who had come over to dinner, were grouped about the large lofty room, talking local gossip.

There was a quiet comfortableness over everything, and I was remarking to Mavie the dismal contrast I should find to-morrow between this cosy home scene and my London rooms, a subject I have usually found create for me much sympathy, when the laird approached.

'O, Forsyth,' he said, 'where is the sketch of the old tower you were making yesterday? I want to show it to Mrs. McNeile. Let's have it, there's a good fellow.'

I was willing enough, so was Mavie.

After some moments' fruitless search, I remembered I had left the drawing in my room, whither I hastened.

The large corridor was illuminated by a lamp; a smaller passage led away from it, and my room opened into this passage, now in profound darkness. There were candlesticks on a table, but, knowing the way so well, I did not stop to take one,

and went gaily along towards my door.

I had found it, and was about to turn the handle, when I saw before me, a few feet distant, a man crouching, with his ear close against the wall level with my door. He slowly turned his head and stared straight at me. It occurred to me that a more evil expression I had never encountered, so full was it of threatening hate and devilish purpose.

I stood fascinated, watching the man. Presently, with hand outspread feeling along the wall, he began creeping towards me; at the same moment the dismal howling of a dog, apparently in one of the rooms, became audible. This sound and the action on his part seemed to release my faculties. I dashed at him—made a grab at his coat-collar—struck the wall: the man was gone!

I stood stupidly; the passage was dark as pitch. Could he have slipped aside, and be waiting to strike me from behind?

Then—THEN, with a revulsion that sent my blood curdling back to my heart, it shot through me:

How did I see him, being in the dark?

That he was there for no good was sufficiently demonstrated; but how could I have seen him? I experienced a curious sensation, as it broke upon me that the man I had beheld was not included in the census of this planet. I felt a tingling in my limbs and a buzzing in my ears. The sensation was physical only—mentally, I may say there was a complete blank.

As the shock passed over I pulled myself together, and retraced my steps down the passage and into the drawing-room. It seemed strange, that lighted room and the commonplace occupants.

If I had been Rip Van Winkle himself it could not have struck me as being more unaccustomed. It was as though I had been for ages in another world, and had to learn this one all over again.

Of course this feeling evaporated almost immediately. Dugald, the eldest son of the house, came up to me. I thought he eyed me strangely; but he merely asked after my sketch. I had forgotten my errand altogether.

When we separated for the night, Dugald came up, and, slipping his arm through mine, remarked,

'I'm coming along to you for a quiet smoke, old fellow. We'll leave the others to the laird to-night.'

It may have been cowardly, but I was really thankful for a human presence down that passage.

We were seated, and the cigars in full swing, when Dugald observed quietly,

'You looked awfully queer when you came back just now. Was there anything wrong?'

I related what I had seen. He listened placidly.

'Well, you may consider yourself a favoured party' (puff); 'you've seen the house ghost.'

I was rather annoyed at his speaking so lightly, and said somewhat tartly,

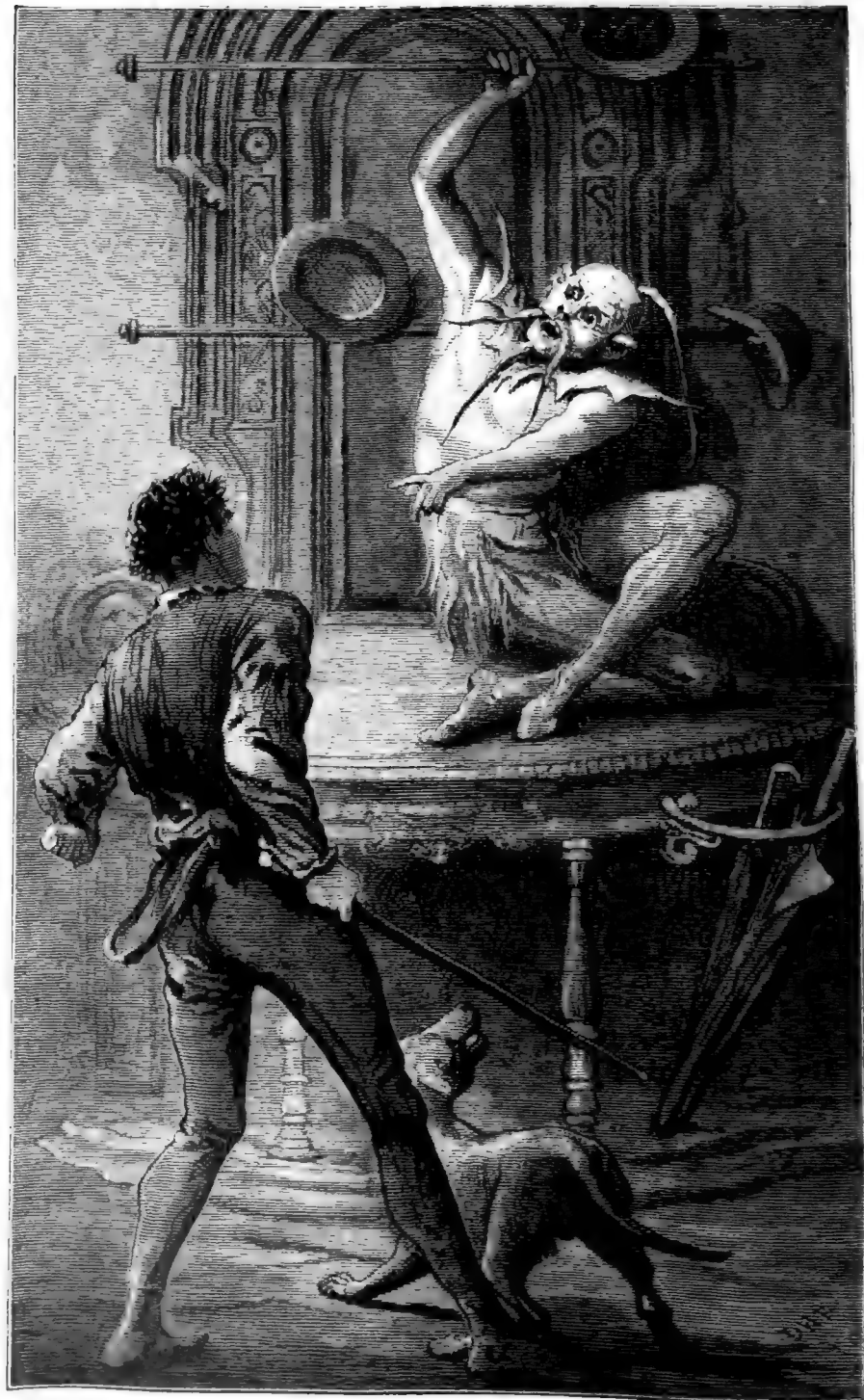
'I should invest in a better-looking one, if I were you—a bigger brute it's never been my luck to come across!'

'Don't be angry, old boy; though you did look jolly scared. I had forgotten all about the thing till I saw you so "raised." The story is simply this: One of the old lairds, far back in the annals of Ghairlee, had among his cousins a man of bad character and a turbulent. Many were the offences he committed and the rows that ensued. At last an

opportunity offered itself to the laird, and he took it, and, as he thought, got rid of his unruly relative altogether. But the villain had sworn revenge in the usual style; and he kept his eye about. In due course the world revolved, and he got *his* turn. It happened—how is not on record—that Ghairlee was left for a short time with but few retainers in it; and this wing—which is the genuine old one renovated, you know—was occupied only by the laird's young bride and a maid. To shorten things, the man secreted himself here, and in the night murdered the poor girl and the maid too—with what circumstances of horror the

history is not very clear about. It is consoling to know that he was caught, and paid the last penalty for his crime; but on the night when the murder was perpetrated he is there, reacting the horrid thing—so they say, at least. I have never seen anything myself. It is also true that I have avoided looking. But to-night I forgot it, or I would have warned you—not that I believe it, you know, of course.'

We don't believe in ghosts, any of us, neither do I; but I was uncommonly glad to quit Ghairlee next day; and I don't expect to find myself there again on the 7th of October—not if I know it!



THE BONELESS BURGLAR.

See the Story.

THE BONELESS BURGLAR.

JOHN HIGGS, of Seven Dials, London, was a bold bad burglar. Jean Higginson, well known at all the principal music-halls of the metropolis, astonished the world in the capacity of a 'boneless wonder.' Allowing for such subtle improvements on a very English name—nobody would care two straws about a boneless wonder or any other wonder called Higgs—allowing, I say, for these Continental embellishments, the reader will doubtless congratulate himself on discovering that Higgs and Higginson, that the burglar and the boneless one, were identical.

Now, England is well off in the matter of burglars, ranging from the paltry pilferer of an umbrella to the powerful midnight armed variety. Our beloved country has also its just proportion of 'boneless wonders,' though, as compared with the other recognised social industry, they are in a very considerable minority. This will be clear to the veriest tyro in the study of human nature or human anatomy. Any person can take what does not belong to him; but to twist the head half-way down the back, drink over the shoulder from a glass resting on the foot, tie the legs and arms in sailor's knots, and generally behave in a limp and diabolical manner—such gifts as these belong only to the genius and double-joints of a boneless wonder.

Both callings have their advantages. As far as applause, fame, the admiration of the mob, and acknowledgments in contemporary

literature—represented by the *Music Hall Rag*—went, Higginson had the best of it; but for solid gain, true excitement, and the discriminate praise of those select few who made up the circle of his bosom friends, Higgs won in a canter. Crime invariably brings with it its own reward; and after any particularly brilliant stroke of business John felt this to be very true. But burglary, like literature, though a first-rate stick in clever hands, makes, for the most part, an indifferent crutch. By a clever manipulation of both callings, however, Mr. Higgs had, for many months, contrived to keep himself in comfort, nay in positive luxury; for the modest bloater, the bottle of gin, and the penny cigar were all accessible to a man who earned fifty pounds a year. But this balmy period of our hero's life came to an end. Fortune's wheel always takes a twist sooner or later, from bad to good, or *vice versa*; and with John Higgs it was, unfortunately, *vice versa*. Mistakes, of course, will happen. An unforeseen circumstance placed him within the clutches of the law, and once more the renowned little man appeared in print—not as the boneless wonder, but a bold bad burglar; not in the music-hall organs, but police reports. Twelve months of durance vile was the result; and, after this partial obliteration, we find the professor, at the beginning of our story, in his peaceful home once more, with his funds low, his prospects very blank.

As we enter No. 6½ Angel

Alley, Seven Dials, Mr. Higgs himself is the first thing of interest our eyes light upon. He is seated at a small table in the one tumbledown little apartment he calls home. There is no fire in the room, but warmth is obtained from a pot of Mr. Higgs's favourite beverage standing on the table. A small square of looking-glass and a hand-painted picture of Jean Higgisenno as he appeared in his celebrated impersonation of 'The Jumping Frog' before 'Is Royal 'Ighness,' are the only adornments of the chamber; while two battered tin cases, holding the professor's theatrical wardrobe, and a tumbled bed on the ground in a corner, constitute the sole remaining furniture in it. The owner of this small assortment of rubbish is a skinny little man, with an enormous head—a decidedly bad head, phrenologists would say—prominent ears and lips, a great lack of nose and forehead, with corresponding development of all the most undesirable bumps to be found on Mr. O'Dell's chart. Close-cropped hair, small black eyes, large hands and feet, with seedy and scanty vesture, are the only other points about his person worth mentioning; and when we add to this description a fondness for tobacco, spirits, and expletive, all the attractive physical and moral attributes of Mr. John Higgs—or 'our hero,' as we should call him—are before the reader. His friends accounted him a 'sharp cove, hard as nails, ugly as sin,' and we cannot improve on their forcible and brief word-painting.

Something very unpleasant is, from his expression, occupying the 'sharp cove's' mind at present, and if we read with him the advertisement in his theatrical paper a clue will soon be furnished us. 'INJIRUBBEROS! The Malayan

Mystery! The Only Real Boneless Human Being in the World!' Yes, with terrible disgust Mr. Higgs learned from his acquaintances that the so-called 'Injirubberos'—a huge black importation, really brought from South Africa—was literally taking the bread out of the acrobatic gentlemen's mouths in all directions. The 'Malayan Mystery' gave his entertainment at three different music-halls every night; and Mr. Higgs, who spent the evening after our introduction to him in critically examining his powerful rival, was bound to confess that he had more than met his match, 'though,' added the vanquished, after some powerful expressions, 'what they want with dirty black heathen when they can get their own countrymen, I'm blowed if I know.' Higgisenno—plain John Higgs for the future—realised accordingly that he was fairly beaten on his boneless merits, and that, therefore, there remained nothing more for this branch of his accomplishments but poverty or the provinces.

A cockney to the pliable backbone, he turned with horror from any thoughts of leaving his old haunts with their hundred sweet memories. There was the Edgware Road adventure, when a 'bus knocked him over; and, when scrambling to his feet, more frightened than hurt, he received a choice shower of shillings and sixpences. Then there was that interesting crossing in the City, conducted so ably by him for a fortnight, during the temporary absence, under lock and key, of its proprietor. Then, when he grew older, how he learned to love that dingy alley, leading from the Strand, up which he fled after stealing his first pocket-handkerchief! There was also that never-to-be forgotten spot outside

the Gaiety pit-door, where 'Signor' something or other had seen him tumbling in his Arab days, and taken him in hand; there were his favourite public— But enough; nothing could induce Mr. John Higgs to leave town.

His career as a public entertainer, therefore, was nipped in the bud; or, at all events, indefinitely suspended. Then, how about burglary, the other string to his bow? In this direction, too, thanks to the scandalous and increasing license given in these irreverent times to the police, poor Higgs felt there was small promise. His instruction had been in the plain straightforward methods of taking his neighbours' goods, but the housebreaker's art improves day by day, like all the other money-making schemes to which men give their minds. Surely there is many a smarter 'cracksman' than Jack Sheppard could ever claim to be among us now. They don't break out of unheard-of dungeons and prison-cells certainly, for they take very good care never to be caught at all. So Mr. Higgs had to advance with the times, to become less conservative, and to think for himself.

It was the spending of his last shilling that did it. Like other geniuses before him, while money was in his purse John thought seldom of the future; but, with that last shilling gone, and poverty at the door, the little man set his mind to work, and, like lightning, there came the inspiration which will hand his name down famous to all posterity. This great idea will be found in the title of my story. John Higgs, a clever acrobat and daring housebreaker, now resolved to unite these accomplishments, and, as a 'Boneless Burglar,' to begin life once again.

Samuel Curly and his brother Seth—your true British vagabond has invariably a good old Bible name—were the tried and trusted 'pals' of John Higgs.

Seth was one of those quiet meek-looking men who sneak about the outskirts of all large towns, engaged in rat-catching, bird-snaring, or some other of those innocent-sounding occupations which always carry something behind them, and which earn for the possessor the premier position in any irate gamekeeper's vermin-list. Samuel was a cobbler who never cobbled, but led an exciting risky existence, similar to his brother; while the leader of this pleasing trio, John Higgs, we already know something about.

These three had gone through fire and water together many a time, as well as through several other places equally exciting and more remunerative. They had all experienced reverses, too, and had each just completed the same pressing six months' engagement.

To the brothers Curly did Higgs accordingly repair with his new idea, and their interest was extreme as the inventor unfolded his plans. Finally, the inspiration was voted brilliant though dangerous, but, on the whole, well worth developing.

Seth Curly knew the brother of an under-gardener at a large house near Woolwich, and, 'from information received,' he considered no establishment would be found better fitted on which to make a trial than Mr. Sprouts's.

John decided that the experiment could not be made too soon, and fixed upon the following Saturday night for action.

The owner and inhabitant of this doomed dwelling was, as Seth Curly knew well, a credulous and very weak-minded man. He believed in ghosts, second-sight,

spirit - warnings, Satanic sign-manuals, vampires, and so forth. Possessed of ample private means, he passed his bachelor life in reading works which related to his favourite subjects, nearly frightening himself into fits, writing copiously and idiotically about things he could not understand, and, altogether, leading an in-offensive and imbecile existence.

He was called Timothy Arthur Sprouts; and a man with a name like that might very well believe, say, or do anything.

Timothy Arthur was reading a work on the doctrines of Pythagoras. He could, of course, neither understand nor appreciate the teachings of the great heathen philosopher, but vaguely meandered through page after page, and, on the important Saturday night fixed upon by Higgs and his friends, was deep in the original theories of transmigration, while, impatiently watching his light from the shrubs below, lurked the three conspirators.

'Very funny,' yawned Timothy, closing his book, 'to think that the life in me might once have been in a shark, or a donkey, or anything—very funny! O, there's a great deal in transmi-mi-gration.'

Then he went sleepily up-stairs to bed; and, after allowing two hours for him to sink into slumber, the burglars began their operations. Seth and Samuel Curly were clad in the rough 'reefer' coat, with huge pockets, which one always associates with the old-fashioned housebreaker; but Higgs was wrapped in a long dark-coloured ulster, under which he wore the tight fitting costume of one of his most famous impersonations; while, carefully folded up, he had stowed away in a pocket the large mask which formed its corresponding head-

gear. His plan was simply this. After having obtained an entrance, to leave boots, coat, and hat outside with his accomplices, and do the ordinary business in the ordinary manner; but, if alarmed or detected, instantly to assume the mask and pose of whatever boneless character he intended to represent.

Timothy Arthur owned a grandmother, and he was peacefully dreaming that the old lady had died and returned to earth in the material garb of a blackbeetle, when a loud crash put an end to his beautiful vision and his sleep together.

He arose, struck a light, and nervously prepared to institute an inquiry as to the origin of this startling sound, which, echoing through the stillness of the night, had awakened the entire household. Robing hastily, he sallied forth, and encountered on the mat outside his door two footmen and the butler in different picturesque stages of undress; while matrons—as cook and housekeeper—and maids, appertaining to the scullery, parlour, and other departments, turned the staircase which led to their domains into a sort of funny domestic parody on Jacob's ladder.

The butler informed his master that 'something was a-smashing something else down-stairs.' Nobody doubted this for a moment, and at the head of a long and trembling procession, poor Sprouts crawled down towards the lower regions of his house, carrying a life-preserver in one hand, a candlestick in the other. The butler came next armed with a poker, the footman also trusted to fire-irons; while their female rear-guard followed at a distance, armed to the teeth with water-jugs, hair-brushes, towel-horses, and other articles, all equally well calculated

to inspire the ordinary burglar with terror.

The dining room was entered, explored, and found to be empty; the library was also 'drawn blank,' and with increasing courage the party prepared to examine the drawing-room—a large, richly-furnished chamber but seldom used. Mr. Sprouts threw open the door, and—well, it certainly was a nasty thing to stumble upon in the middle of the night. On the top of the piano, immediately in front of the explorers, there squatted a huge, bloated, frog-like monster as big as a Newfoundland dog. The creature on being discovered raised itself on its front paws, tilted up a hideous misshapen head, opened a gaping mouth and two great yellow eyes, then giving a clumsy jump, left its perch and alighted with a thud at Timothy's feet.

Talk about a stampedé!

A confused mass of fire-irons, candlesticks, and other bedroom furniture littered the hall in a moment, while the whole valiant crew, after a terrified struggle up the dark staircase, found themselves one and all in their several rooms with locked doors.

'A case of the Pythagorean doctrine, clearly,' stuttered poor Sprouts to himself, as he pushed half the contents of his bed-chamber against the door, lighted three candles, and paused to reflect. 'A case of the Pythagorean doctrine before my very eyes, and an extremely unpleasant one. If,' he continued, 'there's any member of *my* family who could have developed after death into a green toad that size, it's my brother George.'

The said green toad, meanwhile, had become strikingly human in appearance, had laughed a quiet but very human laugh, had struck a match, listened intently for some

moments, and then, lighting a lantern, had begun with great expedition to fill a sack with a collection of silver plates and other valuable trifles, none of which could have been of any possible use to a green toad. Presently the little monster raises and removes his massive head, beneath which is disclosed another set of expressive features, hardly less unclassical or hideous than the last, but clearly belonging to our friend John Higgs. He doubles up and pockets his mask; then, with the heavy sack upon his back, glides cautiously from the room down the stair which leads to the kitchens. His booty is handed through an open window in the back premises to the eager Curlys, and Higgs, after a fruitless attempt to discover the wine-cellar, enters the larder, collects as much as he can comfortably carry inside and out, and then joins his companions. Boots and coat are quickly put on, and the three start across the fields for home and safety.

It is improbable that Pythagoras ever imagined the study of his theory of existence would, some day, materially aid a nineteenth-century burglar. Yet so it was.

The thought of thieves had never once entered Mr. Sprouts's head, and it was not until the following morning, when the household had risen, that this student of demonology realised he had been robbed.

In due time the police arrived, ransacked both house and garden, and asked for any details which might assist them. But there were none forthcoming. Nobody was going to talk to Detective Cox about a green toad with red spots on it; absurd! And the notion was absurd, undoubtedly, by daylight. As the butler after-

wards said in confidence to Mr. Sprouts,

'All of us has a reputation for sobriety, as the recitation of them terrible adventures would knock on the head completely!'

A search showed that the robbers had accidentally upset in the drawing-room a large glass globe of water, which, falling, had smashed to atoms, and strewn the floor with the corpses of gold and silver fish, water-spiders, and other unpleasant creatures.

'Did none of yer 'ear this thing come down?' asked a policeman of the servants.

'I half fancied I heard a sound last night late,' answered the butler, with a look of joyful inspiration, as if the whole mystery was now unravelled.

Every one else, of course, had to lie, too, and the police were—for the first time in their lives, one and all absolutely vowed—without a clue.

The broken window in the scullery was discovered, and half a fowl upon the grass outside it; though these led to nothing but a startling theory propounded by Mr. Sprouts himself, that the whole business might possibly have been the work of some wild animal—a monkey (he had lately been reading Edgar Poe), a dog with more than its fair share of instinct, or even a cat.

But, as half the valuable nick-nacks in his state-room had disappeared, Timothy's argument was speedily proved untenable. Upon his domestics being suspected, he observed he himself would go surety for their innocence; so the law retired for the present, completely baffled, to make inquiries among a certain class of its London friends.

There was joy that afternoon at No. 6½ Angel Alley—a calm, peaceful joy, which always follows

the satisfactory completion of any great work. John Higgs, as he sat reading the papers, soon knew all about that particularly daring burglary near Woolwich; but there was no mention of a large green monster in any of the reports, and as he felt the lion's—or rather the toad's—share of profits in his pocket, visions of a bright and active future opened before him, and he smiled contentedly.

No less than five times did the versatile little man repeat his bold trick, ably assisted on each occasion by the Curly brothers. On two of these midnight raids his disguises had been unnecessary, but whenever John was discovered, his hideous appearance always instantly cleared the course. One wealthy old maiden lady had nearly fallen in a fit at the sight of a weird little black fiend, with only one leg, and great red wings; while several other persons had been equally scared. But in every case did the nervous weak-minded victims, whose houses were invariably selected, carefully abstain from revealing the strange sights they saw, fearing much too acutely the ridicule and unbelief which they thought must undoubtedly follow any such confessions.

This bold trade upon sensitive nerves paid Messrs. John, Seth, and Samuel very well; indeed, visions of a small public-house and respectable middle age already filled the mind of Mr. Higgs, when Nemesis, long delayed, came down upon him and his companions.

Judge Tozer was a red-faced, profane Anglo-Indian, who believed in nothing human or divine, except his liver.

It was a grave error of judgment to make any attempt on a house with such a master as the judge; but their unqualified successes combined with rumours of

costly Indian treasures to urge them on this rash undertaking, which one and all agreed should be the last.

It was the last.

To be brief, about three o'clock in the morning of one day in December, Judge Tozer was roused from his sleep by the furious barking of a little terrier which he always allowed to wander about his mansion at night. A thoroughbred little animal this, which would as soon have thought of barking without a cause as he would of going to sleep or flying; and more useful, the judge said, than all the electric rubbish and 'burglar's horrors' in the world.

Hastily robing, the startled Tozer snatched up a walking-stick and bundled down-stairs.

A bright moon shot long shafts of many colours through the stained glass of two lofty hall-windows, and in this variegated light stood, or rather hung suspended, a figure which might very well have caused any ordinary human being to fly terrified: a large humpbacked creature, clinging with one bony hand to a tall hat-rack, and pointing with the other straight at Judge Tozer. Strange phosphorescent light glowed on its face, which resembled that of a dead Chinaman, while the lower part of the figure was either lost in shadow or else entirely wanting. This apparition remained motionless, with its jaw fallen and its great almond-shaped eyes fixed upon the judge, who amazedly returned the look and rubbed his own eyes hard, to make sure he was in reality awake.

Satisfied of this, the heroic man hurled himself boldly upon the spectre, seizing its skinny throat and laying hold of its long black pigtail. A desperate struggle followed, in which the hat-rack fell with a crash, and in

which—extraordinary transformation!—the deathlike head, pigtail, and very shoulders of his antagonist came off in the judge's hands.

By dint of frantic efforts, however, he managed to secure one thin wiry arm made of real flesh and blood, to which he clung like a leech, turn and writhe as it would. Such an encounter between two such men generated a perfect atmosphere of profanity, and the conflict was at its height when Seth and Samuel appeared at one end of the hall, while at the same moment two footmen with lights came rushing down the staircase five or six steps at a time.

To their everlasting shame be it spoken, the Curlys fled like one man, leaving their leader to surrender, which he immediately did, and emerged from the ruins of his impersonation, dishevelled, panting, and nearly strangled, with a dozen dog-bites in each leg.

A moment afterwards thundering double knocks at the front door told that this wild disturbance had attracted public attention, and 'enter' two triumphant policemen, each with a Curly. By some extraordinary coincidence these preservers of peace had for once been in the right place at the right time; and our wily brothers, hard pressed, as they imagined, had dropped over the garden-wall of Judge Tozer's premises into the hands—in fact, almost on to the heads—of the law.

There is little more to be told. An exceedingly humorous trial followed, in which Mr. Higgs, with an eye to posthumous fame, confessed all, explained every detail, and concluded by offering to give the court illustrations.

"The jumpin' frog" were the best of all; "the one-legged fiend" warn't bad for old ladies; but that

cussed "umpbacked mandaring"
bust the 'ole thing!

With these words the trial virtually ended. After their arduous labours a grateful country granted ten years' rest and retirement to the illustrious trio.

What more pleasing region for

such a holiday than Devonshire?
What more delightful district than Dartmoor? And what more charming unsophisticated spot than Princetown, in the heart thereof?
John Higgs, the boneless burglar, is there now.

H. E. PHILLPOTTS.

A WINTER FAIRY.

SUMMER face and winter snows—
June pursuing chill December!
How the graybeard's forehead glows
When the sweet breath of the rose
Softly bids the sad sere heart remember!

Even as the icebound rill
Thaws beneath the sunshine, gleaming
In the hollow of the hill,
Sheltered from the north wind shrill,
Wakes the pulse of age to youthful seeming.

Fair and young this maiden face
Blooms amid the frosty branches.
Vision bright of springtide grace,
Wilt thou not their sorrow chase,
And the imprisoned fairy buds enfranchise?

It may not be; and so farewell,
Sweet face, December brightly greeting.
Blossom and leaf obey no spell,
And beauty comes unbid to dwell
Brief time on earth—a ray of gladness fleeting.

GODFREY TURNER.

THE SILVER HATCHET.

On the 3rd of December 1861 Dr. Otto von Hopstein, Regius Professor of Comparative Anatomy of the University of Buda-Pesth, and Curator of the Academic Museum, was foully and brutally murdered within a stone-throw of the entrance to the college quadrangle.

Besides the eminent position of the victim and his popularity amongst both students and townsfolk, there were other circumstances which excited public interest very strongly, and drew general attention throughout Austria and Hungary to this murder. The *Pesther Abendblatt* of the following day had an article upon it, which may still be consulted by the curious, and from which I translate a few passages giving a succinct account of the circumstances under which the crime was committed, and the peculiar features in the case which puzzled the Hungarian police.

'It appears,' said that very excellent paper, 'that Professor von Hopstein left the University about half-past four in the afternoon, in order to meet the train which is due from Vienna at three minutes after five. He was accompanied by his old and dear friend, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger, sub-Curator of the Museum and Privat-docent of Chemistry. The object of these two gentlemen in meeting this particular train was to receive the legacy bequeathed by Graf von Schulling to the University of Buda-Pesth. It is well known that this unfortunate nobleman, whose tragic fate is still fresh in the recollection of the public, left

his unique collection of mediæval weapons, as well as several priceless black-letter editions, to enrich the already celebrated museum of his Alma Mater. The worthy Professor was too much of an enthusiast in such matters to intrust the reception or care of this valuable legacy to any subordinate, and, with the assistance of Herr Schlessinger, he succeeded in removing the whole collection from the train, and stowing it away in a light cart which had been sent by the University authorities. Most of the books and more fragile articles were packed in cases of pine-wood, but many of the weapons were simply done round with straw, so that considerable labour was involved in moving them all. The Professor was so nervous, however, lest any of them should be injured that he refused to allow any of the railway employés (*Eisenbahn-diener*) to assist. Every article was carried across the platform by Herr Schlessinger, and handed to Professor von Hopstein in the cart, who packed it away. When everything was in, the two gentlemen, still faithful to their charge, drove back to the University, the Professor being in excellent spirits, and not a little proud of the physical exertion which he had shown himself capable of. He made some joking allusion to it to Reinmaul, the janitor, who, with his friend Schiffer, a Bohemian Jew, met the cart on its return, and unloaded the contents. Leaving his curiosities safe in the store-room and locking the door, the Professor handed the key to his

sub-curator, and, bidding every one good-evening, departed in the direction of his lodgings. Schlesinger took a last look to reassure himself that all was right, and also went off, leaving Reinmaul and his friend Schiffer smoking in the janitor's lodge.

'At eleven o'clock, about an hour and a half after Von Hopstein's departure, a soldier of the 14th regiment of Jäger, passing the front of the University on his way to barracks, came upon the lifeless body of the Professor lying a little way from the side of the road. He had fallen upon his face with both arms stretched out. His head was literally split in two halves by a tremendous blow, which, it is conjectured, must have been struck from behind, there remaining a peaceful smile upon the old man's face, as if he had been still dwelling upon his new archæological acquisition when death had overtaken him. There is no other mark of violence upon the body except a bruise over the left patella, caused probably by the fall. The most mysterious part of the affair is that the Professor's purse, containing forty-three gulden, and his valuable watch, have been untouched. Robbery cannot, therefore, have been the incentive to the deed, unless the assassins were disturbed before they could complete their work.

'This idea is negated by the fact that the body must have lain at least an hour before any one discovered it. The whole affair is wrapped in mystery. Dr. Langemann, the eminent medic-jurist, has pronounced that the wound is such as might have been inflicted by a heavy sword-bayonet wielded by a powerful arm. The police are extremely reticent upon the subject, and it is suspected that they are in possession of a

clue which may lead to important results.'

Thus far the *Pesther Abendblatt*. The researches of the police failed, however, to throw the least glimmer of light upon the matter. There was absolutely no trace of the murderer, nor could any amount of ingenuity invent any reason which could have induced any one to commit the dreadful deed. The deceased Professor was a man so wrapped in his own studies and pursuits that he lived apart from the world, and had certainly never raised the slightest animosity in any human breast. It must have been some fiend, some savage, who loved blood for its own sake, who struck that merciless blow.

Though the officials were unable to come to any conclusions upon the matter, popular suspicion was not long in pitching upon a scape-goat. In the first published accounts of the murder the name of one Schiffer had been mentioned as having remained with the janitor after the Professor's departure. This man was a Jew, and Jews have never been popular in Hungary. A cry was at once raised for Schiffer's arrest; but as there was not the slightest grain of evidence against him, the authorities very properly refused to consent to so arbitrary a proceeding. Reinmaul, who was an old and most respected citizen, declared solemnly that Schiffer was with him until the startled cry of the soldier had caused them both to run out to the scene of the tragedy. No one ever dreamed of implicating Reinmaul in such a matter; but still, it was rumoured that his ancient and well known friendship for Schiffer might have induced him to tell a falsehood in order to screen him. Popular feeling ran very high upon the subject, and there seemed a dan-

ger of Schiffer's being mobbed in the street, when an incident occurred which threw a very different light upon the matter.

On the morning of the 12th of December, just nine days after the mysterious murder of the Professor, Schiffer the Bohemian Jew was found lying in the north-western corner of the Grand Platz stone dead, and so mutilated that he was hardly recognisable. His head was cloven open in very much the same way as that of Von Hopstein, and his body exhibited numerous deep gashes, as if the murderer had been so carried away and transported with fury that he had continued to hack the lifeless body. Snow had fallen heavily the day before, and was lying at least a foot deep all over the square; some had fallen during the night, too, as was evidenced by a thin layer lying like a winding-sheet over the murdered man. It was hoped at first that this circumstance might assist in giving a clue by enabling the footsteps of the assassin to be traced; but the crime had been committed, unfortunately, in a place much frequented during the day, and there were innumerable tracks in every direction. Besides, the newly-fallen snow had blurred the footsteps to such an extent that it would have been impossible to draw trustworthy evidence from them.

In this case there was exactly the same impenetrable mystery and absence of motive which had characterised the murder of Professor von Hopstein. In the dead man's pocket there was found a note-book containing a considerable sum in gold, and several very valuable bills, but no attempt had been made to rifle him. Supposing that any one to whom he had lent money (and this was the first idea which occurred to the police)

had taken this means of evading his debt, it was hardly conceivable that he would have left such a valuable spoil untouched. Schiffer lodged with a widow named Gruga at 49 MarieTheresa Strasse, and the evidence of his landlady and her children showed that he had remained shut up in his room the whole of the preceding day in a state of deep dejection, caused by the suspicion which the populace had fastened upon him. She had heard him go out about eleven o'clock at night for his last and fatal walk, and as he had a latch-key she had gone to bed without waiting for him. His object in choosing such a late hour for a ramble obviously was that he did not consider himself safe if recognised in the streets.

The occurrence of this second murder so shortly after the first threw not only the town of Buda-Pesth, but the whole of Hungary into a terrible state of excitement, and even of terror. Vague dangers seemed to hang over the head of every man. The only parallel to this intense feeling was to be found in our own country at the time of the Williams murders described by De Quincey. There were so many resemblances between the cases of Von Hopstein and of Schiffer that no one could doubt that there existed a connection between the two. The absence of object and of robbery, the utter want of any clue to the assassin, and, lastly, the ghastly nature of the wounds, evidently inflicted by the same or a similar weapon, all pointed in one direction. Things were in this state when the incidents which I am now about to relate occurred, and in order to make them intelligible I must lead up to them from a fresh point of departure.

Otto von Schlegel was a younger son of the old Silesian family of

that name. His father had originally destined him for the army, but at the advice of his teachers, who saw the surprising talent of the youth, had sent him to the University of Buda-Pesth to be educated in medicine. Here young Schlegel carried everything before him, and promised to be one of the most brilliant graduates turned out for many a year. Though a hard reader, he was no book-worm, but an active powerful young fellow, full of animal spirits and vivacity, and extremely popular among his fellow-students.

The New Year examinations were at hand, and Schlegel was working hard—so hard that even the strange murders in the town, and the general excitement in men's minds, failed to turn his thoughts from his studies. Upon Christmas Eve, when every house was illuminated, and the roar of drinking songs came from the Bierkeller in the Student-quartier, he refused the many invitations to roystering suppers which were showered upon him, and went off with his books under his arm to the rooms of Leopold Strauss, to work with him into the small hours of the morning.

Strauss and Schlegel were bosom friends. They were both Silesians, and had known each other from boyhood. Their affection had become proverbial in the University. Strauss was almost as distinguished a student as Schlegel, and there had been many a tough struggle for academic honours between the two fellow-countrymen, which had only served to strengthen their friendship by a bond of mutual respect. Schlegel admired the dogged pluck and never-failing good temper of his old playmate; while the latter considered Schlegel, with his many talents and brilliant versatility, the most accomplished of mortals.

The friends were still working together, the one reading from a volume on anatomy, the other holding a skull and marking off the various parts mentioned in the text, when the deep-toned bell of St. Gregory's church struck the hour of midnight.

'Hark to that!' said Schlegel, snapping up the book and stretching out his long legs towards the cheery fire. 'Why, it's Christmas morning, old friend! May it not be the last that we spend together?'

'May we have passed all these confounded examinations before another one comes?' answered Strauss. 'But, see here, Otto, one bottle of wine will not be amiss. I have laid one up on purpose;' and with a smile on his honest South German face, he pulled out a long-necked bottle of Rhenish from amongst a pile of books and bones in the corner.

'It is a night to be comfortable indoors,' said Otto von Schlegel, looking out at the snowy landscape; 'for 'tis bleak and bitter enough outside. Good health, Leopold!'

'*Lebe hoch!*' replied his companion. 'It is a comfort indeed to forget sphenoid bones and ethmoid bones, if it be but for a moment. And what is the news of the corps, Otto? Has Graube fought the Swabian?'

'They fight to-morrow,' said Von Schlegel. 'I fear that our man will lose his beauty, for he is short in the arm. Yet activity and skill may do much for him. They say his hanging guard is perfection.'

'And what else is the news amongst the students?' asked Strauss.

'They talk, I believe, of nothing but the murders. But I have worked hard of late, as you know, and hear little of the gossip.'

'Have you had time,' inquired Strauss, 'to look over the books and the weapons which our dear old Professor was so concerned about the very day he met his death? They say they are well worth a visit.'

'I saw them to-day,' said Schlegel, lighting his pipe. 'Reinmaul, the janitor, showed me over the store-room, and I helped to label many of them from the original catalogue of Graf Schulling's museum. As far as we can see, there is but one article missing of all the collection.'

'One missing?' exclaimed Strauss. 'That would grieve old Von Hopstein's ghost. Is it anything of value?'

'It is described as an antique hatchet, with a head of steel and a handle of chased silver. We have applied to the railway company, and no doubt it will be found.'

'I trust so,' echoed Strauss; and the conversation drifted off into other channels. The fire was burning low and the bottle of Rhenish was empty before the two friends rose from their chairs, and Von Schlegel prepared to depart.

'Ugh! It's a bitter night!' he said, standing on the doorstep and folding his cloak round him. 'Why, Leopold, you have your cap on. You are not going out, are you?'

'Yes, I am coming with you,' said Strauss, shutting the door behind him. 'I feel heavy,' he continued, taking his friend's arm, and walking down the street with him. 'I think a walk as far as your lodgings, in the crisp frosty air, is just the thing to set me right.'

The two students went down Stephen Strasse together and across Julien Platz, talking on a variety of topics. As they passed

the corner of the Grand Platz, however, where Schiffer had been found dead, the conversation turned naturally upon the murder.

'That's where they found him,' remarked Von Schlegel, pointing to the fatal spot.

'Perhaps the murderer is near us now,' said Strauss. 'Let us hasten on.'

They both turned to go, when Von Schlegel gave a sudden cry of pain and stooped down.

'Something has cut through my boot!' he cried; and feeling about with his hand in the snow, he pulled out a small glistening battle-axe, made apparently entirely of metal. It had been lying with the blade turned slightly upwards, so as to cut the foot of the student when he trod upon it.

'The weapon of the murderer!' he ejaculated.

'The silver hatchet from the museum!' cried Strauss in the same breath.

There could be no doubt that it was both the one and the other. There could not be two such curious weapons, and the character of the wounds was just such as would be inflicted by a similar instrument. The murderer had evidently thrown it aside after committing the dreadful deed, and it had lain concealed in the snow some twenty metres from the spot ever since. It was extraordinary that of all the people who had passed and repassed none had discovered it; but the snow was deep, and it was a little off the beaten track.

'What are we to do with it?' said Von Schlegel, holding it in his hand. He shuddered as he noticed by the light of the moon that the head of it was all dabbled with dark-brown stains.

'Take it to the Commissary of Police,' suggested Strauss.

'He'll be in bed now. Still, I think you are right. But it is nearly four o'clock. I will wait until morning, and take it round before breakfast. Meanwhile I must carry it with me to my lodgings.'

'That is the best plan,' said his friend; and the two walked on together talking of the remarkable find which they had made. When they came to Schlegel's door, Strauss said good-bye, refusing an invitation to go in, and walked briskly down the street in the direction of his own lodgings.

Schlegel was stooping down putting the key into the lock, when a strange change came over him. He trembled violently and dropped the key from his quivering fingers. His right hand closed convulsively round the handle of the silver hatchet, and his eye followed the retreating figure of his friend with a vindictive glare. In spite of the coldness of the night the perspiration streamed down his face. For a moment he seemed to struggle with himself, holding his hand up to his throat as if he were suffocating. Then, with crouching body and rapid noiseless steps, he crept after his late companion.

Strauss was plodding sturdily along through the snow, humming snatches of a student song and little dreaming of the dark figure which pursued him. At the Grand Platz it was forty yards behind him; at the Julien Platz it was but twenty; in Stephen Strasse it was ten, and gaining on him with panther-like rapidity. Already it was almost within arm's length of the unsuspecting man, and the hatchet glittered coldly in the moonlight, when some slight noise must have reached Strauss's ears, for he faced suddenly round upon his pursuer. He started and uttered an exclamation, as

his eye met the white set face, with flashing eyes and clenched teeth, which seemed to be suspended in the air behind him.

'What, Otto!' he exclaimed, recognising his friend. 'Art thou ill? You look pale. Come with me to my— Ah! hold, you madman, hold! Drop that axe! Drop it, I say, or by heaven I'll choke you!'

Von Schlegel had thrown himself upon him with a wild cry and uplifted weapon, but the student was stout-hearted and resolute. He rushed inside the sweep of the hatchet and caught his assailant round the waist, narrowly escaping a blow which would have cloven his head. The two staggered for a moment in a deadly wrestle, Schlegel endeavouring to shorten his weapon; but Strauss with a desperate wrench managed to bring him to the ground, and they rolled together in the snow, Strauss clinging to the other's right arm and shouting frantically for assistance. It was as well that he did so, for Schlegel would certainly have succeeded in freeing his arm had it not been for the arrival of two stalwart gendarmes attracted by the uproar. Even then the three of them found it difficult to overcome the maniacal strength of Schlegel, and they were utterly unable to wrench the silver hatchet from his grasp. One of the gendarmes, however, had a coil of rope round his waist, with which he rapidly secured the student's arms to his sides. In this way, half pushed, half dragged, he was conveyed, in spite of furious cries and frenzied struggles, to the central police-station.

Strauss assisted in coercing his former friend, and accompanied the police to the station, protesting loudly at the same time against any unnecessary violence,

and giving it as his opinion that a lunatic asylum would be a more fitting place for the prisoner. The events of the last half-hour had been so sudden and inexplicable that he felt quite dazed himself. What did it all mean? It was certain that his old friend from boyhood had attempted to murder him, and had nearly succeeded. Was Von Schlegel then the murderer of Professor von Hopstein and of the Bohemian Jew? Strauss felt that it was impossible, for the Jew was not even known to him, and the Professor had been his especial favourite. He followed mechanically to the police-station, lost in grief and amazement.

Inspector Baumgarten, one of the most energetic and best known of the police officials, was on duty in the absence of the Commissary. He was a wiry little active man, quiet and retiring in his habits, but possessed of great sagacity and a vigilance which never relaxed. Now, though he had had a six hours' vigil, he sat as erect as ever, with his pen behind his ear, at his official desk, while his friend, Sub-inspector Winkel, snored in a chair at the side of the stove. Even the inspector's usually immovable features betrayed surprise, however, when the door was flung open and Von Schlegel was dragged in with pale face and disordered clothes, the silver hatchet still grasped firmly in his hand. Still more surprised was he when Strauss and the gendarmes gave their account, which was duly entered in the official register.

'Young man, young man,' said Inspector Baumgarten, laying down his pen, and fixing his eyes sternly upon the prisoner, 'this is pretty work for Christmas morning; why have you done this thing?'

'God knows!' cried Von Schlegel,

covering his face with his hands and dropping the hatchet. A change had come over him, his fury and excitement were gone, and he seemed utterly prostrated with grief.

'You have rendered yourself liable to a strong suspicion of having committed the other murders which have disgraced our city.'

'No, no, indeed!' said Von Schlegel earnestly. 'God forbid!'

'At least, you are guilty of attempting the life of Herr Leopold Strauss.'

'The dearest friend I have in the world,' groaned the student. 'O, how could I! How could I!'

'His being your friend makes your crime ten times more heinous,' said the inspector severely. 'Remove him for the remainder of the night to the— But steady! Who comes here?'

The door was pushed open, and a man came into the room, so haggard and careworn that he looked more like a ghost than a human being. He tottered as he walked, and had to clutch at the backs of the chairs as he approached the inspector's desk. It was hard to recognise in this miserable-looking object the once cheerful and rubicund sub-curator of the museum and privat-docent of chemistry, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. The practised eye of Baumgarten, however, was not to be baffled by any change.

'Good-morning, mein herr,' he said; 'you are up early. No doubt the reason is that you have heard that one of your students, Von Schlegel, is arrested for attempting the life of Leopold Strauss?'

'No; I have come for myself,' said Schlessinger, speaking huskily, and putting his hand up to his throat. 'I have come to ease my soul of the weight of a great sin,

though, God knows, an unmediated one. It was I who— But, merciful heavens! there it is—the horrid thing! O that I had never seen it!

He shrank back in a paroxysm of terror, glaring at the silver hatchet where it lay upon the floor, and pointing at it with his emaciated hand.

‘There it lies!’ he yelled. ‘Look at it! It has come to condemn me. See that brown rust on it! Do you know what that is? That is the blood of my dearest, best friend, Professor von Hopstein. I saw it gush over the very handle as I drove the blade through his brain. Mein Gott, I see it now!’

‘Sub-inspector Winkel,’ said Baumgarten, endeavouring to preserve his official austerity, ‘you will arrest this man, charged on his own confession with the murder of the late Professor. I also deliver into your hands, Von Schlegel here, charged with a murderous assault upon Herr Strauss. You will also keep this hatchet’—here he picked it from the floor—‘which has apparently been used for both crimes.’

Wilhelm Schlessinger had been leaning against the table, with a face of ashy paleness. As the inspector ceased speaking, he looked up excitedly.

‘What did you say?’ he cried. ‘Von Schlegel attack Strauss! The two dearest friends in the college! I slay my old master! It is magic, I say; it is a charm! There is a spell upon us! It is—Ah, I have it! It is that hatchet—that thrice accursed hatchet!’ and he pointed convulsively at the weapon which Inspector Baumgarten still held in his hand.

The inspector smiled contemptuously.

‘Restrain yourself, mein herr,’ he said. ‘You do but make your

case worse by such wild excuses for the wicked deed you confess to. Magic and charms are not known in the legal vocabulary, as my friend Winkel will assure you.’

‘I know not,’ remarked his sub-inspector, shrugging his broad shoulders. ‘There are many strange things in the world. Who knows but that—’

‘What!’ roared Inspector Baumgarten furiously. ‘You would undertake to contradict me! You would set up your opinion! You would be the champion of these accursed murderers! Fool, miserable fool, your hour has come!’ and rushing at the astounded Winkel, he dealt a blow at him with the silver hatchet which would certainly have justified his last assertion had it not been that, in his fury, he overlooked the lowness of the rafters above his head. The blade of the hatchet struck one of these, and remained there quivering, while the handle was splintered into a thousand pieces.

‘What have I done?’ gasped Baumgarten, falling back into his chair. ‘What have I done?’

‘You have proved Herr Schlessinger’s words to be correct,’ said Von Schlegel, stepping forward, for the astonished policemen had let go their grasp of him. ‘That is what you have done. Against reason, science, and everything else though it be, there is a charm at work. There must be! Strauss, old boy, you know I would not, in my right senses, hurt one hair of your head. And you, Schlessinger, we both know you loved the old man who is dead. And you, Inspector Baumgarten, you would not willingly have struck your friend the sub-inspector?’

‘Not for the whole world,’ groaned the inspector, covering his face with his hands.

‘Then is it not clear? But



THE SILVER HATCHET.

See the Story.

now, thank Heaven, the accursed thing is broken, and can never do harm again. But, see, what is that ?

Right in the centre of the room was lying a thin brown cylinder of parchment. One glance at the fragments of the handle of the weapon showed that it had been hollow. This roll of paper had apparently been hidden away inside the metal case thus formed, having been introduced through a small hole, which had been afterwards soldered up. Von Schlegel opened the document. The writing upon it was almost illegible from age ; but as far as they could make out it stood thus, in mediæval German :

‘ Diese Waffe benutzte Max von Erlichingen um Joanna Bodeck zu ermorden, deshalb beschuldige Ich, Johann Bodeck, mittelst der macht welche mir als mitglied des Concils des rothen Kreuzes verliehen wurde, dieselbe mit dieser unthat. Mag sie anderen denselben schmerz verursachen den sie mir verursacht hat. Mag Jede hand die sie ergreift mit dem blut eines freundes geröthet sein.

“ Immer übel—niemals gut
Geröthet mit des freundes blut.”

Which may be roughly translated :

‘ This weapon was used by Max von Erlichingen for the murder of Joanna Bodeck. Therefore do I, Johann Bodeck, accuse it by the power which has been bequeathed to me as one of the Council of the Rosy Cross. May it deal to others the grief which it has dealt to me ! May every hand that grasps it be reddened in the blood of a friend !

“ Ever evil, never good,
Reddened with a loved one's blood.”

There was a dead silence in the room when Von Schlegel had finished spelling out this strange

document. As he put it down Strauss laid his hand affectionately upon his arm.

‘ No such proof is needed by me, old friend,’ he said. ‘ At the very moment that you struck at me I forgave you in my heart. I well know that if the poor Professor were in the room he would say as much to Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger.’

‘ Gentlemen,’ remarked the inspector, standing up and resuming his official tones, ‘ this affair, strange as it is, must be treated according to rule and precedent. Sub inspector Winkel, as your superior officer, I command you to arrest me upon a charge of murderously assaulting you. You will commit me to prison for the night, together with Herr von Schlegel and Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger. We shall take our trial at the coming sitting of the judges. In the mean time take care of that piece of evidence’—pointing to the piece of parchment—‘ and, while I am away, devote your time and energy to utilising the clue you have obtained in discovering who it was who slew Herr Schiffer, the Bohemian Jew.’

The one missing link in the chain of evidence was soon supplied. On the 28th of December the wife of Reinmaul the janitor, coming into the bedroom after a short absence, found her husband hanging lifeless from a hook in the wall. He had tied a long bolster-case round his neck and stood upon a chair in order to commit the fatal deed. On the table was a note in which he confessed to the murder of Schiffer the Jew, adding that the deceased had been his oldest friend, and that he had slain him without premeditation, in obedience to some uncontrollable impulse. Remorse and grief, he said, had

driven him to self-destruction; and he wound up his confession by commending his soul to the mercy of Heaven.

The trial which ensued was one of the strangest which ever occurred in the whole history of jurisprudence. It was in vain that the prosecuting counsel urged the improbability of the explanation offered by the prisoners, and deprecated the introduction of such an element as magic into a nineteenth-century law-court. The chain of facts was too strong, and the prisoners were unanimously acquitted. 'This silver hatchet,' remarked the judge in his summing up, 'has hung untouched upon the wall in the mansion of the Graf von Schulling for nearly two hundred years. The shocking manner in which he met his death at the hands of his favourite house steward is still fresh in your recollection. It has come out in evidence that, a few days before the murder, the steward had overhauled the old weapons and cleaned them. In doing this he must have touched the handle of this hatchet. Immediately afterwards he slew his master, whom he had served faithfully for twenty years. The weapon then came, in conformity with the Count's will, to Buda-Pesth, where, at the station, Herr Wilhelm Schlessinger grasped it, and, within two hours, used it against the person of the deceased Professor. The next man whom we find touching it is the janitor Reinmaul, who helped to remove the weapons from the cart to the store-room. At the first opportunity he buried it in the body of his friend Schiffer. We then have the attempted murder of Strauss by Schlegel, and of Winkel by Inspector Baumgarten, all immediately following the taking of the hatchet into the hand. Lastly,

comes the providential discovery of the extraordinary document which has been read to you by the clerk of the court. I invite your most careful consideration, gentlemen of the jury, to this chain of facts, knowing that you will find a verdict according to your consciences without fear and without favour.'

Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence to the English reader, though it found few supporters among the Hungarian audience, was that of Dr. Lange-mann, the eminent medico-jurist, who has written text-books upon metallurgy and toxicology. He said:

'I am not so sure, gentlemen, that there is need to fall back upon necromancy or the black art for an explanation of what has occurred. What I say is merely a hypothesis, without proof of any sort, but in a case so extraordinary every suggestion may be of value. The Rosicrucians, to whom allusion is made in this paper, were the most profound chemists of the early Middle Ages, and included the principal alchemists, whose names have descended to us. Much as chemistry has advanced, there are some points in which the ancients were ahead of us, and in none more so than in the manufacture of poisons of subtle and deadly action. This man, Bodeck, as one of the elders of the Rosicrucians, possessed, no doubt, the recipe of many such mixtures, some of which, like the *agua tofana* of the Medicis, would poison by penetrating through the pores of the skin. It is conceivable that the handle of this silver hatchet has been anointed by some preparation which is a diffusible poison, having the effect upon the human body of bringing on sudden and acute attacks of

homicidal mania. In such attacks it is well known that the mad-man's rage is turned against those whom he loved best when sane. I have, as I remarked before, no proof to support me in my theory, and simply put it forward for what it is worth.'

With this extract from the speech of the learned and ingenious professor, we may close the account of this famous trial.

The broken pieces of the silver hatchet were thrown into a deep pond, a clever poodle being employed to carry them in his mouth, as no one would touch them for

fear some of the infection might still hang about them. The piece of parchment was preserved in the museum of the University. As to Strauss and Schlegel, Winkel and Baumgarten, they continued the best of friends, and are so still for all I know to the contrary. Schlessinger became surgeon of a cavalry regiment, and was shot at the battle of Sadowa five years later, while rescuing the wounded under a heavy fire. By his last injunctions his little patrimony was to be sold to erect a marble obelisk over the grave of Professor von Hopstein.

A. CONAN DOYLE.

THE POSTMAN'S KNOCK.

THE postman's knock! What dreams of uncertainty
Pass through the brain at the postman's round!
A letter for some one—an invite, a message,
Something fulfilling a sorrowful presage;
An offer of friendship, some bright possibility
Marking a goal for our truth and nobility:
All are bound up in that nerve-stirring sound,
The summons of Fate, the postman's knock.

The postman's knock! What wonderful memories
Rise to our thoughts from the depths of the past!
Moments of anguish, of gratified vanity,
Suitors' fond joy at some loving inanity;
Letters foretelling a parting, a meeting;
A child's *only* letter, a mother's last greeting,
Treasured for years and preserved to the last:
Such memories dwell in the postman's knock.

The postman's knock! Ah, Youth takes it jauntily;
Life is so bright, with its tinge of the rose;
But Age has few hopes, and expects few new pleasures—
Its story is told; in remembrance it treasures
The passion outlived, the fresh feelings of youth,
The struggle for fame, the quest of the truth;
And dreads the sharp shock to its placid repose,
Like the summons of Death—the postman's knock!

CHARLES S. CATTY.